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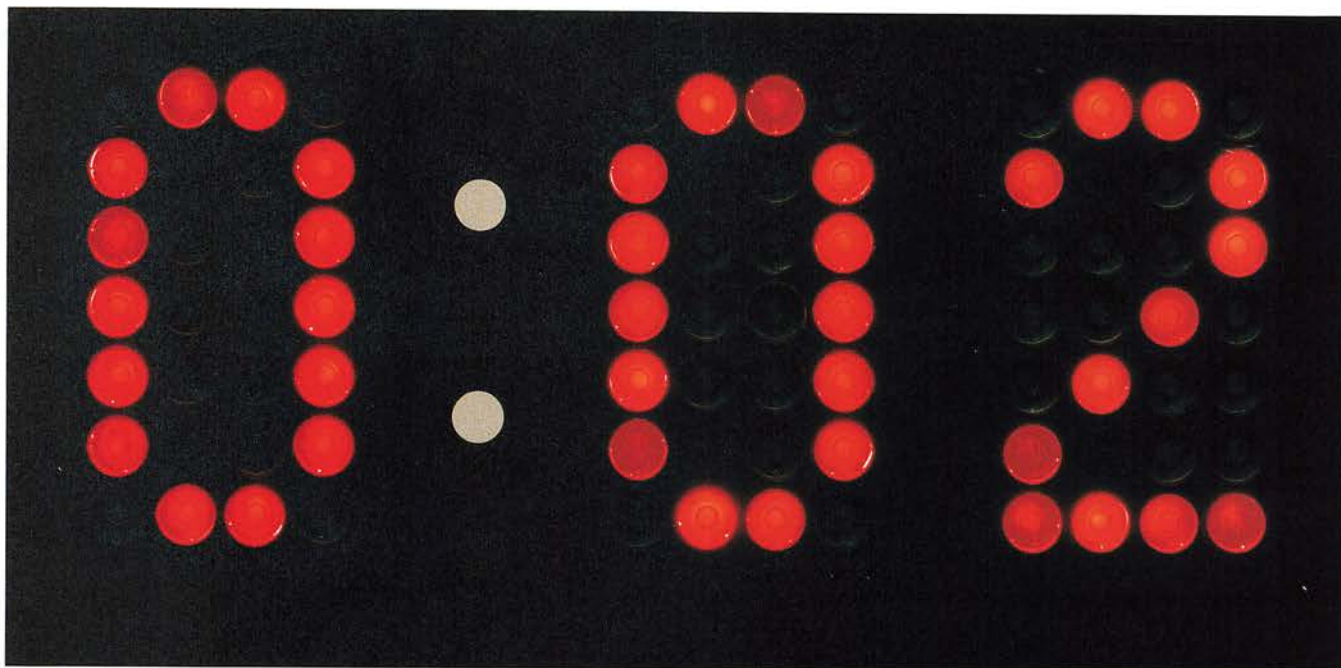
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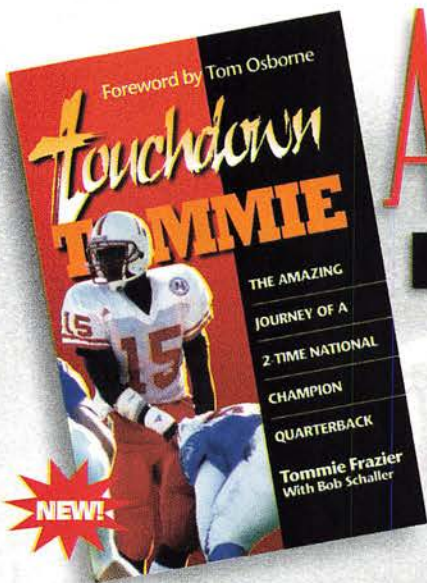
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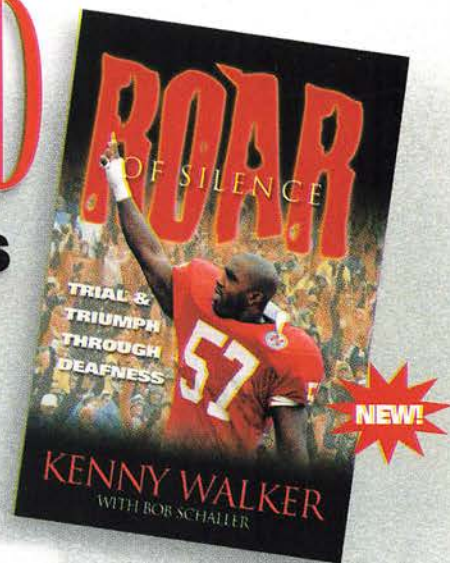
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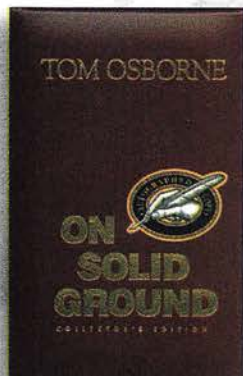
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A very private person of few words, Frazier speaks out for the first time to answer questions people have long asked. Follow along in *Touchdown Tommie* as Frazier blends an interesting mix of off-the-field and on-the-field stories about triumph and tragedy, from long days in the hospital to his relationship with Tom Osborne, and find out the rest of the story behind one of Nebraska's most intriguing legends, Tommie Frazier.

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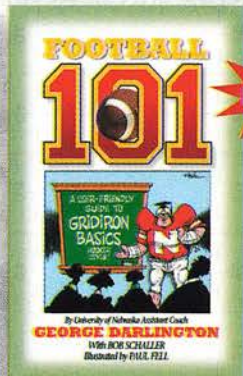
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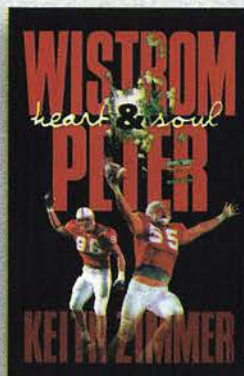
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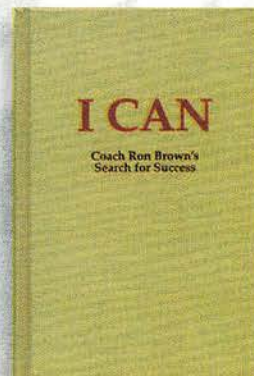
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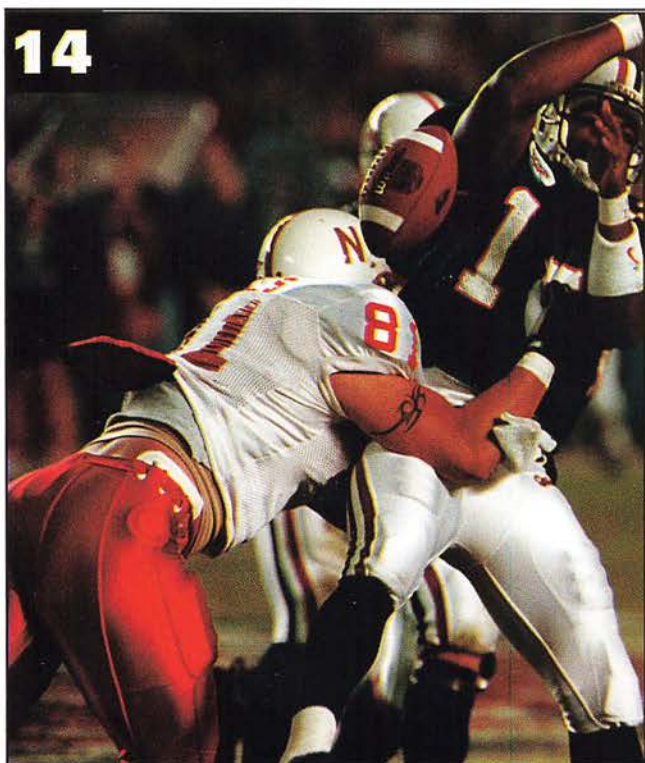
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26 Line Of Questions

Nebraska's running game sputtered in 1998, and the inexperienced offensive line took the rap. *By Mike Babcock*



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On The Cover

Nebraska fullback Joel Makovicka looks for an opening during the Holiday Bowl Dec. 30 in San Diego. *Photo by Robert Wasserman*

NEXT ISSUE

Should mail around Feb. 20, 1999.

Tremendous pressure

For those who may be ready to run Frankie Solich out of town, I've got one thing to say: "Put yourself in his position." As fans, we put tremendous pressure on our team. We forget to look at all the odds. First, the Big 12 has some very good teams. Then, we lost some great players to graduation and the NFL. And the last problem was all the injuries incurred by key players. Not to mention the mental pressure of small changes in the normal operation with a new coach. I want to commend not only Frank but the whole team for weathering the storm this season.

Howard E. Tibbens
Tamuning, Guam

Ease off Solich

At the start of the season, I felt a No. 3 or 4 rating a bit high. In my mind, as well as in my heart, I knew this would be a season where we would lose some games because we had to go to A&M and KSU, both with excellent teams. Add to the equation, Green in Seattle, Bobby and DeAngelo hurting, a secondary consistently giving up 80-yard plays, and you have an uphill battle. I feel Frank is doing a great job and has handled the various situations well. Next year is his chance to silence the critics, with 14 or 15 returning starters who better have redemption on their minds for 1999. Tom would have last some games, too.

Pat O'Connor
Post Falls, Idaho

True fans don't criticize

An imitation Husker football fan will criticize the team and coach after a loss or a win. That same person will criticize a non-perfect season. Most of us are true Husker fans. We do not, in the media, criticize our Huskers. We are proud of our 1998 Nebraska team.

Zeke Beranek
Jacksonville, Ill.

Look out next year

As a longtime Big Red fan, I find it disheartening and sad that some fans seem to think that our Husker football team was not successful this year. Although we stubbed our toes a few times, I really feel that we were a lot bet-

ter than our record indicates.

Big Red fans are the best in the country. Starting next year, the Huskers will be a team on a mission: to prove to everybody that 1998 was a fluke. Look out teams on the Huskers' 1999 schedule, especially Kansas State on Nov. 13. Nebraska football will be back on track, winning and winning convincingly.

Randy Dreiling
Hays, Kan.

Penalties!!!

Has the game passed many of the conference officials? Are they from the old SWC (South Worst Conference)? What is pass interference or a face mask?

In the A&M game, we hold them on third down, and both teams are halfway to the bench, and a penalty flag comes in for pass interference on the Huskers. In the Texas game, pass interference calls on both teams were not even close.

Was Eric Crouch grabbed by the face mask? They almost needed a stretcher to carry him off the field. How on earth could an official miss that call? It sure would have been interesting to see what the Huskers could have done if they had the ball at the 50-yard line with two and one-half minutes to play.

Guy Smith
Springdale, Ark.

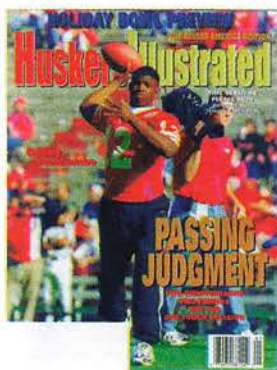
True fans don't criticize

I was wondering what the trophy looked like for winning the Eddie Robinson Classic to start the season. I know the Huskers got a trophy for beating Oklahoma State in the Western Truck Classic in Kansas City.

Also, we thought the old Big Eight officials were bad, but the "zebras" in the Big 12 are the worst anywhere.

Gary Garey
Syracuse, Neb.

According to the Nebraska Sports Information Department, there was no trophy for winning the Eddie Robinson Classic. — Editor



Huskers Illustrated

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Got Something To Say?

Please send your comments and questions to: Letters, 3210 NW 3rd St., Lincoln, Neb. 68521. You can also fax them to us at (402) 474-5132. We reserve the right to edit the letters for clarity, content and length. For those with electronic mail abilities, Hleditor@aol.com.

Enshrined

Tom Osborne played two seasons with the NFL's Washington Redskins before becoming a graduate assistant on Bob Devaney's first staff in 1962. He joined the Redskins in New York City, Osborne has joked. "I can remember standing out in front of the Waldorf-Astoria."

"Being the high-class organization they were then, that's where the Redskins always stayed when they were in New York . . . out in front of the Waldorf-Astoria."

In December, Osborne returned to the famed Waldorf-Astoria, inside rather than out front, for the National Football Foundation and College Football Hall of Fame induction ceremony.

Osborne becomes the sixth former Cornhusker coach in the Hall of Fame. The others so honored have been Bob Devaney (1962-72), "Biff" Jones (1937-41), D.X. Bible (1929-36), E.N. Robinson (1896-97) and Fielding Yost (1898). Eleven Nebraska players also have been inducted.

Osborne, who retired after last season, is the first NCAA Division IA coach to be inducted prior to the Hall of Fame's three-year waiting period. Former Grambling coach Eddie Robinson is the only other member of the Hall of Fame for whom the three-year waiting period was waived.

Robinson was inducted a year ago.

Osborne's teams compiled a 255-49-3 record (an .836 winning percentage) and won three national championships in his final four seasons. They won or shared 13 conference titles.

Osborne ranks sixth all-time in victories among Division IA coaches, behind "Bear" Bryant, Amos Alonzo Stagg, "Pop" Warner, Joe



Former Nebraska coach Tom Osborne receives his plaque from Hall of Famer Pete Dawkins, the 1958 Heisman Trophy winner at Army, during the December ceremonies in New York.

Paterno and Bobby Bowden.

He ranks fifth all-time in winning percentage among major college football coaches, behind Knute Rockne, Frank Leahy, George Woodruff and Barry Switzer.

"Whenever somebody, a player or a coach, gets into a hall of fame, there's a lot of people very responsible," Osborne was quoted by the Associated Press.

"And that's the case here. I'm just the figurehead."

In addition to Osborne, 12 former college players were inducted into the Hall of Fame this year, among them Jim McMahon, Bill Fralic, Randy Gradishar and Bo Jackson.

Osborne said the relationships meant the most to him. "There have been many great moments, a few not so great. But it's the players I've known and the coaches that

NEBRASKA'S HALL OF FAMERS

(Players)	(Year inducted)
Ed Weir (1923-25)	1951
George Sauer (1931-33)	1954
Guy Chamberlin (1913-15)	1962
Clarence Swanson (1919-22)	1973
Sam Francis (1934-36)	1977
Bobby Reynolds (1950-52)	1984
Forrest Behm (1938-40)	1988
Wayne Meylan (1965-67)	1991
Bob Brown (1961-63)	1993
Rich Glover (1970-72)	1995
Dave Rimington (1979-82)	1997
(Coaches)	
Fielding Yost (1898)	1951
D.X. Bible (1929-36)	1951
"Biff" Jones (1937-41)	1954
E.N. Robinson (1896-97)	1955
Bob Devaney (1962-72)	1981
Tom Osborne (1973-97)	1998



Nebraska fullback Joel Makovicka received an \$18,000 postgraduate scholarship.

have been important."

One of those players, senior Joel Makovicka, was among 17 student-athletes who received \$18,000 postgraduate scholarships from the National Football Foundation at the induction ceremony.

"Coach Osborne was not just a great coach or a great teacher; he's a great person, and that's how people should remember him," Makovicka told the Omaha World-Herald's Steven Pivovar.

Makovicka is the 17th Cornhusker to receive a foundation scholarship. ■



Kevin Steele was a Nebraska assistant from 1989-94.

QUICK HITS

What's Happening In Nebraska Athletics?

GILL TURNS DOWN SOONER OFFER

New Oklahoma head coach Bobby Stoops offered Cornhusker quarterbacks coach Turner Gill the offensive coordinator's job, but Gill declined. Nebraska rush ends coach Nelson Barnes was reportedly offered a job on Stoops' staff in Norman as well. But Barnes denied the reports.

"Leaving is always a possibility when you're on a staff with a recognized program like ours," Solich, who had such opportunities while he was an assistant, told the Lincoln Journal Star.

"When a guy is wanting to leave and that's what he wants, more power to him. You do what you can to advance his career. Everybody has a different idea of what (coaching) goals are. Some have ambition of being a head coach down the road. You're going to have that on every staff."

Stoops, a former Kansas State assistant, was the defensive coordinator at Florida.

SEVEN CORNHUSKERS RECEIVE DEGREES

Seven members of this season's team and three former Cornhuskers received degrees at the university's graduation ceremony at the Devaney Sports Center in mid-December.

The seven were Monte Christo, Jay Foreman, Josh Heskew, Quint Hogrefe, Brian Morro, Mike Rucker and Brandt Wade. Former Cornhuskers Casey Macken, Matt Hunting and Todd Millikan also received degrees.

Millikan was an All-Big Eight tight end as a senior in 1988.

SPEAKING OF ACADEMICS . . .

Nebraska led the Big 12 in first-team academic all-conference honorees with 22. Texas Tech was second with 17 first-team selections. Six Cornhuskers received honorable mention.

Fullback Joel Makovicka, rush end Chad Kelsay and punter Bill Lafleur represented Nebraska on the GTE Academic All-America first team. All three were seniors in eligibility.

JACKSON, BROWN MAKE ALL-AMERICA TEAMS

Senior tight end and co-captain Sheldon Jackson and junior cornerback Ralph Brown were included on the Associated Press All-America team. Jackson was a second-team selection, and Brown was a third-team selection. "When I came here, I was compared to Junior Miller and Johnny Mitchell, and I was trying to be myself," Jackson told the Lincoln Journal Star. "I watched a lot of tapes of those guys so I could become a player (of the quality) of many of those tight ends of the past."

Jackson caught 19 passes for 343 yards and four touchdowns this season.

Brown set a school single-season record by breaking up 14 passes. ■

Ex-Husker assistant new Baylor coach

Former Cornhusker assistant Kevin Steele (1989-94) was hired as head coach at Baylor in mid-December, replacing Dave Roberts, who was fired after two 2-9 seasons.

Steele had been an assistant for the NFL's Carolina Panthers.

"He'll do a great job. He's a very energetic coach, very organized, a very good recruiter," said Nebraska coach Frank Solich. "So I think he'll

bring a lot to the table as far as helping Baylor get their program where they would like to get it. I'm sure he'll be able to put together a very fine staff.

"He has stayed in touch with a number of (college) coaches."

Solich and Steele kept in touch after Steele left Nebraska.

"Kevin's a very good friend," Solich said, adding that he had attempted to contact Steele

after an incident in which he was attacked on the sideline by Carolina line-backer Kevin Greene.

"Those kind of situations can happen to anybody. They can happen in pro ball. They can happen in college ball. They can happen in high school ball," said Solich. "So those of us in coaching try not to play that up very much, knowing it could happen to any of us . . . at any given moment." ■

Transitions Can Be Difficult

*It's easy to take things for granted
when everything goes well*



**Brian
HILL**

YOU OFTEN HEAR the word smooth used with transition. Believe me, that isn't always the case.

The state has a new governor, who never has been a professional wrestler, but the transition of possibly greater concern to most Nebraskans in the past year occurred in the Nebraska football offices. Frank Solich was named head coach a little more than a year ago, after serving 19 years on the staff of Hall of Fame coach

Tom Osborne.

As if following a coaching legend in a program coming off its third national championship in four seasons wouldn't be difficult enough, Solich had to do it without some key components — All-American defensive linemen and emotional leaders Grant Wistrom and Jason Peter, Outland Trophy winner Aaron Taylor, No. 2 all-time leading rusher Ahman Green and two-year starting quarterback Scott Frost.

Although the race for the starting quarterback and I-back slots drew most of the attention, rebuilding the offensive line and replacing the leadership of the 1997 seniors were possibly more important.

In a spring football preview last March, I wrote:

"Although most eyes will be on the quarterback race when Nebraska opens spring football practice March 30, what's up front will count just as much in how successful the Huskers are in defending their latest national championship."

Nebraska's most successful teams, even before the national championship years, have had outstanding, experienced offensive lines. It's easy to take them for granted at a school that has won 13 NCAA rushing titles and seven in the last 11 years.

Losing four offensive linemen who started every game, and five of the top six, added to the difficulties of breaking in a new quarterback and replacing Green, who moved on to the NFL after his junior season.

Green rushed for 1,877 yards in 1997, 1,078 more than this year's leader, I-back Correll Buckhalter. Green gained more than 100 yards 11 times, and the Huskers had a total of 16 100-yard-plus rushing efforts. This season, that total was seven, three by Buckhalter, two by quarterback Eric Crouch and one each by I-backs

DeAngelo Evans and Dan Alexander.

Evans, who looked like he had returned to form with 146 yards against Washington in Game 4, was slowed by injuries and gained just 73 yards the rest of the season. Alexander, after a breakout game of 110 yards and three touchdowns against Iowa State, suffered a season-ending knee injury the next week in the Kansas State game.

The injury bug bit the Huskers early, as quarterback Bobby Newcombe suffered a knee injury in the season opener and played in just six games. Crouch also missed four games because of injury.

That made the transition even more difficult for Solich and the Nebraska football program.

Speaking of transition, you may have noticed a new name in the front of January's magazine. That would be yours truly.

I'm not new to the state and local sports scene. A lifelong Nebraskan, I started my journalism career as a score-taker at the North Platte Telegraph about 27 years ago. While attending the University of Nebraska, I started working for the Lincoln Journal Star, where I spent 19 years in the sports department, the last five as executive sports editor. Most recently, I was employed by News Link, a newsletter company in Lincoln, and served as interim editor and contributing editor of Nebraska Sports America magazine.

On Dec. 1, I became the editor/general manager of Huskers Illustrated.

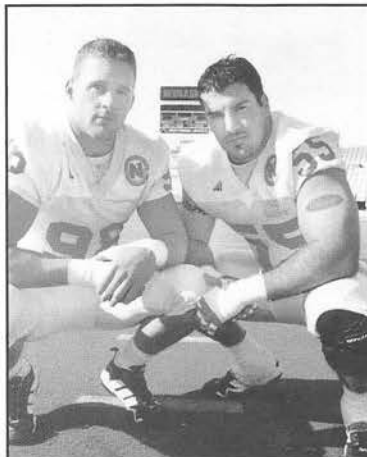
Huskers Illustrated, in its 19th year, was recently purchased by Landmark Community Newspapers of Shelbyville, Ky., from College Sports Communications of Dallas. Landmark also owns several other college sports publications — Inside Indiana, Voice of

the Hawkeyes, The Cats' Pause and Gator Bait. Many readers are probably familiar with The Weather Channel, which is owned by Landmark Communications Inc.

My thanks go to marketing and advertising director Jeff Tuder and contributing editor Mike Babcock, as well as former editor Chris Greer, for helping me get to know HI.

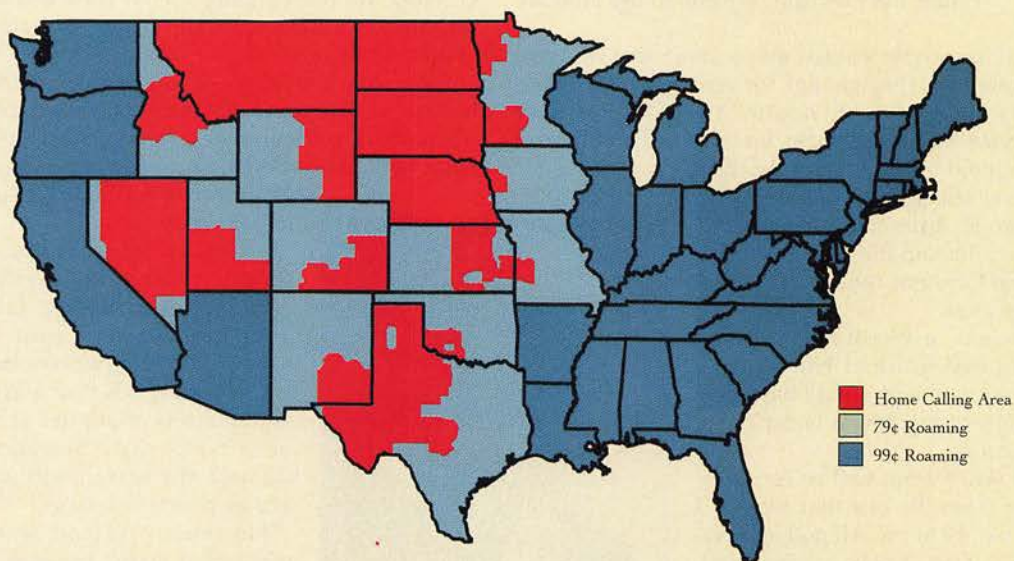
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**Nebraska missed the leadership of
Grant Wistrom (left) and Jason
Peter.**

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New Leaders Will Step Forward

Coach dismisses suggestions that bowl game's outcome will affect next season



**Mike
BABCOCK**

A 41-21 VICTORY against Virginia Tech in the 1996 Orange Bowl game set the stage for Nebraska's national championship run in 1997. So the Holiday Bowl game against Arizona could have served a similar purpose if the Cornhuskers had won. But it won't because they didn't.

Such a connection can only be made after the fact, which probably is the reason coach Frank Solich focused on the present rather than the future prior to the Holiday

Bowl game.

"It seemed like people wanted me to say it, that we were using this game as a springboard for next season," Solich told reporters after the 23-20 loss to Arizona. "We were playing this game for our program, for our team and for our seniors. We wanted to end this season right."

"Next season will take care of itself, and we've got a good team coming back. But this game was all about the players on this year's team. So I did not consider it in that manner whatsoever."

Nevertheless, a victory against an Arizona team that finished No. 4 in the Associated Press rankings would have provided a significant emotional boost going into the off-season.

Still, next year's team will be considerably different from the one that went 9-4 and finished No. 19 in the AP poll and No. 20 in the ESPN/USA Today coaches' poll. Those are Nebraska's lowest final rankings since 1990, when it was No. 24 in the AP poll and tied for No. 17 in the coaches' poll.

Solich will lose eight players with starting experience, assuming wingback Shevin Wiggins isn't granted an additional season of eligibility as a result of a change in NCAA rules brought about by a federal court decision. Because of that change, weakside linebacker Eric Johnson will return next season.

In addition to Johnson, who was expected to undergo surgery on a separated left shoulder suffered in the Holiday Bowl, 22 other players who have started at least once will return in 1999. Nine of those 22, like Johnson, will be the seniors from whom the team should get its leadership.

The emotional Johnson is a good bet to emerge as a leader, and possibly be picked as a captain, but Solich declined to speculate on which players would assume that critical responsibility.

"I wouldn't feel real comfortable about throwing names out there now," he said the morning after the Holiday Bowl game. "What will happen is, through their work ethic, leaders will develop."

"That's the way it's been. The leadership of our team has come from our winter conditioning program and leading into spring ball and the summer conditioning program."

"The guys who have put in the time, put in the extra time, the guys who pushed other players to get it done, that's where your leaders start to step forward. And rather than patting somebody on the back right now for that and sell somebody else short, I'd just rather not mention names."

Presumably, quarterbacks Eric Crouch and Bobby Newcombe also will provide leadership, though Newcombe will miss spring practice while recovering from reconstructive knee surgery.

Newcombe's absence in the spring will be a concern because "we were hoping that we'd be able to get two quarterbacks extensive playing time," Solich said after the surgery in December.

"We were hoping we would be able to settle on one quarterback so that we would have a tremendously experienced quarterback going into next season. As it's played out, we'll have two quarterbacks who have experience but probably not extensive playing experience going into the season."

Crouch will benefit from another spring, certainly. But depth at quarterback — sophomore walkon Jay Runty is the only other one of note right now — remains a significant concern.

"We know this year what can happen to you in terms of injuries at any given position," Solich said. "Sometimes you can get through the season with your No. 1 guy and be pretty fortunate."

However, "we had several (positions) where that wasn't the case. We're going to try to develop backups at every position," he said. "But it's certainly going to be critical at quarterback."

Newcombe won't be the only player of note likely to miss spring practice. Johnson could be sidelined if he has surgery on his

shoulder, along with defensive back Joe Walker, fullback Willie Miller and possibly I-back Dan Alexander, all of whom have undergone surgery.

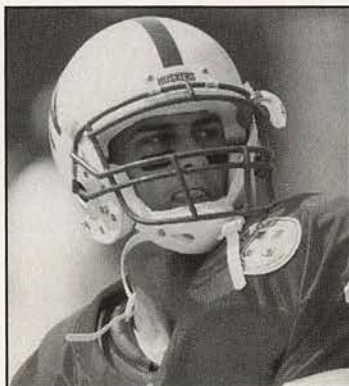
Wingback Frankie London, who's recovering from a broken leg, might practice.

All of those players missed the Holiday Bowl. Whether or not any of them could have made enough of a difference to give Nebraska a victory is pointless speculation.

Solich, like Tom Osborne before him, isn't one to speculate, at least not for the record, which might be the reason he dismissed suggestions the bowl game's outcome would affect next season.

As he walked off the field at Qualcomm Stadium, however, you can bet he was already looking to the future and the off-season preparation so essential to success in the fall.

"The attitude of our football team was excellent through the season, and the young players coming back will want to get things right, so they will have a good work ethic, I'm sure," he said. ■



Eric Crouch will benefit from another spring, but depth at quarterback remains a significant concern.



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*It's almost like an exclusive club
made up of elite athletes and weekend wannabes*



**Bill
DOLEMAN**

GIVEN THE RECENTLY completed Nebraska football season, in which nine would-be starters missed 45 games due to injury, the following may be filed under "Believe it or not" or "Go figure."

First, let me begin by telling you that it was the kind of basketball game that as a broadcaster you hope for when you sit down on press row and put on the headset, especially when one team is heavily favored over the other. You're hoping for

"a good one," and this one, while it wasn't necessarily played at a high level, was "a good one."

After a back-and-forth battle that saw the lead change hands several times, six seconds remained. Team A, we'll call them the underdog good guys, led Team B, or the heavily favored bad guys, by two points with a pair of free throws coming. If both were made, Team A would ice the game.

As it turned out, a miss and a make left the door open for the bad guys and for fate.

Instead of broadcasting said game, yours truly was a participant, extending what was an average athletic career one game longer than I should have. It was one of those innocent alumni basketball tournaments that returns us to our small hometowns — in my case Fairbury, Neb. — and takes us back to those thrilling days of yesteryear that get better as the years go by.

Anyway, my team, which now represents the third-oldest era in the tourney, somehow managed to take a late lead over a team made up of the youngest group, which by the way included a pair of Husker walkons in Mitch Ebke and Matt Grummert. They, and their like, are either athletes or still athletic. I and my kind are kidding ourselves. Be that as it may, we led heading into the final six fateful seconds.

After the second free throw, the young guys made a long pass to half-court, and a couple of dribbles later, set up for a three-point attempt that, if good, would tie the game. Having reserved my energy numerous times throughout the game, I leaped into action in a heroic effort to block the shot.

(It probably would have been my first in my 32 years.)

As I flew by the shooter, he passed. When I landed, I blew my knee. Or, more accurately, I tore the anterior cruciate ligament in my right knee. Who would have thought the

injury bug that plagued the Nebraska football program throughout the 1998 season would reach so deep, that even the host of coach Frank Solich's television show couldn't escape its wrath.

Believe it or not. Go figure.

That was Nov. 28, the day after the Colorado game. I had surgery 11 days later. It's amazing the number of people who you run into (figuratively only) who have suffered a similar injury and the unmistakable been-there-done-that bond you share. It's almost like an exclusive club made up of elite athletes and weekend wannabes. Unfortunately, I've now paid my dues twice. But experience doesn't lessen the anxiety. It's a long road back.

One of the first people I saw was Jenny Benson. One of the stars of the Nebraska soccer team, Jenny was forced to redshirt after suffering an ACL injury last summer. I inundated her with questions, and she answered every one with an encouraging tone.

As I limped away, I remembered back to the early fall, when she took part in the soccer team's preseason media day. Jenny's season was over before it began, but she was there to answer questions and tell why the 1998 Huskers were going to be a great team even without her. Then the emotion of that reality overcame her, and her voice wavered with emotion. I bet doing that hurt as badly as her injury. The Huskers did have a good season without her, but they'll be better than ever next season when she's back.

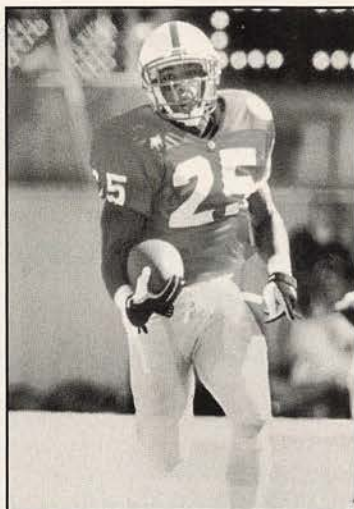
The tables were turned a week after my operation. It was then that I had a chance meeting with Joe Walker, the Husker football team's return specialist who suffered the same injury just days after mine. He waited for surgery until after the first of the year.

I could tell when we met that he was a little nervous about what lay ahead. "What's it like?" was his first question. The rest were similar to the ones that I've heard and asked many times. I'm not a doctor, nor do I play one on TV. But I did the best I could to answer each one and to be encouraging at the same time. I'm not sure how much help I was, but given the fact that Joe is at least 10 years younger than I am and at least 10 times the better athlete, his recovery will be complete long before mine.

As for me, my glory days have passed me by. A set of knees with matching battle scars tells me that my playing days are probably behind me. Probably.

If so, they ended on a good note.

After all, the good guys won. ■



**Husker return specialist
Joe Walker suffered the
same type of injury.**

Bill Doleman's face is familiar to Cornhusker fans. He is host for several Nebraska-related television programs including the "Husker Show" and coaches' shows for Terry Pettit, Paul Sanderford and Frank Solich.

BCS Formula Isn't A Cure-all

New Bowl Championship Series matches No. 1 and No. 2, but the overall outcome sparks more cries for a playoff system



Curt McKEEVER

THE DIFFERENCE between the way the college basketball and NCAA Division I-A football seasons end is that there's no March with football.

But without a playoff system in place, football definitely has the edge with the madness part.

The first year of the Bowl Championship Series — a formula used to rank teams on the basis of polls and both computer and strength-of-schedule ratings to determine who would meet in a national championship setting — did end up with No. 1 versus No. 2. But the pieces to the puzzle didn't exactly fit smoothly into place.

On the final day of a zany regular season, two undefeated teams who were second and third in the BCS standings — UCLA and Kansas State — blew their chance for a Fiesta Bowl bid and let Florida State in the back door to meet Tennessee.

"I've never accomplished so much doing nothing and just sitting on the couch," said a joyous Florida State coach Bobby Bowden, who on Dec. 5 watched UCLA lose to Miami 49-45 and then saw Texas A&M ruin Kansas State's season with a 36-33 double-overtime decision. "When A&M scored, I just turned to my wife, Ann, and said, 'Honey, we're going to Phoenix.' It's amazing."

Florida State entered the season ranked, but after beating Texas A&M in the Kickoff Classic, lost decisively to North Carolina State, which finished 7-4. The Seminoles won 10 in a row but still sat fourth in the BCS standings entering the final day.

FSU was fifth — behind UCLA, Ohio State, Tennessee and Kansas State — when the first BCS poll came out at the end of October. Two weeks later, the Buckeyes let a 17-point lead at home against Michigan State slip away and lost 28-24. From that point on, the BCS was a three-team race between Tennessee, UCLA and Kansas State, the only remaining unbeaten Division I-A teams besides Tulane.

The Volunteers, ranked No. 9 and 10 in the preseason media and coaches' polls, opened the year by beating Syracuse with a last-second field goal, then topped Florida in overtime. Along the way, they lost their offensive workhorse, tailback Jamal Lewis, to a knee injury, and needed a flukish fumble by Arkansas in the final two minutes in order to steal a victory from the Razorbacks.

Even after UCLA and Kansas State suffered their Dec. 5 misfortunes, Tennessee found itself trailing Mississippi State 14-10, before quarterback Tee Martin produced two

touchdown passes in a 28-second span of the fourth quarter to secure a trip to Tempe, Ariz.

"We said all along we thought it would work itself out, not really knowing how it would work itself out," Tennessee coach Phillip Fulmer said.

Had the Volunteers not rallied, Kansas State would have wound up No. 2 in the BCS poll. The Wildcats finished third and, because the BCS was designed only to determine the national championship participants, slid all the way out of a BCS game to the Alamo Bowl.

"I think it'll have to be fine-tuned," Nebraska coach Frank Solich said of the BCS. "The way it played out this year was probably not fair to some teams."

It also sparked more cries for a playoff system.

"I've never been a proponent of a playoff. I've always said I like the system. If they vote us in, good. If they don't, we'll live with it," Bowden said. "But I'm getting to where I think we probably ought to have a four-team playoff. There are some other teams that maybe deserve this more than us. We're lucky."

The popular belief much of the season was that Ohio State had the most-talented team. The Buckeyes were ranked No. 1 for nine weeks before they slipped up. They finished fourth in the final BCS standings.

"I think I can make the argument we are one of the top two teams in the country," OSU coach John Cooper said. But "you stub your toe one time, and you might not get a chance to come back."

Still, Cooper wants to see the BCS run its course before it's judged. Critics, however, say the formula is too complex, and that unless there's two unbeaten teams, it fails to guarantee a true No. 1 vs. No. 2 matchup.

But along with the controversy comes a greater interest.

"I think people were always anxious each week to see how the ratings were," Solich said. "We always had some of that with the (media and coaches') polls, but it seemed like there was a great deal of interest."

Until Division I-A begins a playoff to determine its national champion, the annual head scratching at the end of a season will remain part of the game.

Does that make the BCS plan bad? Hardly. It just ensures some more madness. ■



Nebraska coach Frank Solich says the Bowl Championship Series formula could use some fine-tuning.

Curt McKeever is a sportswriter, covering the University of Nebraska for the Lincoln Journal Star. In addition to reporting on football he is the primary beat writer for the men's basketball and baseball teams.

The final play of the 1998 Nebraska football season was a pass, thrown by redshirted freshman quarterback Eric Crouch and intended for sophomore split end Matt Davison.

Crouch released the ball from his own 23-yard line, into the cool San Diego night.

It sailed in a tight spiral, well over Davison's head and probably could have been caught by Chris McAlister, Arizona's All-America cornerback, near the Wildcat 13-yard line.

But McAlister, who had already intercepted two Crouch passes, the second just three minutes earlier, allowed the ball to drop. There was no reason to catch it because time had elapsed.

And Arizona had won the Holiday Bowl game, 23-20.

While the Wildcats celebrated, the Nebraska players worked their way to the locker room at Qualcomm Stadium. "It's definitely a disappointment," Crouch would tell reporters afterward.

"But there are a lot of things I can learn from that game."

If there was anything positive to be taken from Nebraska's fourth loss in 13 games, it was the experience of the young players such as Crouch who will return next season.

"I thought Eric was tremendous today," coach Frank Solich said. "He maybe started a little slowly, but you've got to understand that he is very young and that he has not started many games."

Crouch's Holiday Bowl start was his sixth as a collegian.

"He is learning on the run," Solich said, no pun intended.

A more precise description would have been "learning on the pass" because the Cornhuskers, perennial national rushing champions, couldn't run with any consistency. So what else was new?

Nebraska finished with its second-lowest rushing total of the season, 87 yards on 34 carries.

The Cornhuskers managed only 21 yards on 15 carries in the second half.

Crouch accounted for a team-high net of 28 of the yards on 15 carries. He ran as much out of necessity as by design. He was sacked three times for 24 yards in losses. "I thought he was tremendous in his composure," said Solich. "When things looked their worst is when he responded."

"He's that type of quarterback. He's got that type of ability, and it showed."

Despite the interceptions, Crouch was most effective passing. He completed 12-of-28 for 193 yards and both Cornhusker touchdowns, the first on a 45-yarder to Shevin Wiggins with 1:53 remaining in the first half, the second on a 4-yarder to Tracey Wistrom with 10:55 remaining in the game.

The Wistrom touchdown capped an eight-play, 88-yard drive and produced a 20-14 lead. For a fleeting moment, it appeared Nebraska might earn a victory despite its offensive woes. But a Blackshirt defense grown weary from spending too much time on the field couldn't hold off Arizona.

The Wildcats responded by driving 68 yards on nine plays, the last a 1-yard touchdown run by Kelvin Eafon, a 5-foot-11, 218-pound senior whose primary responsibility was as a blocker.

The winning drive began with a 7-yard pass, followed by eight running plays, including gains of

An Arizona player recovers a fumble in the first half, just out of the reach of Nebraska defensive tackle Steve Warren.

Robert Wasserman

Despite four turnovers and an ineffective ground game, Nebraska stayed with No. 5 Arizona before falling 23-20 in the Holiday Bowl





o Close

20 by quarterback Keith Smith and 15 by Trung Canidate, who finished with 101 yards on 22 carries.

Until then, Nebraska's defense had held its own, despite being put in difficult situations by Cornhusker mistakes, including lost fumbles by Wiggins and quarterback Monte Christo.

Arizona recovered both first-quarter fumbles deep in Nebraska territory, Wiggins' at the 21-yard line and Christo's at the 15-yard line. But the Wildcats had to settle for field goals both times.

"I was worried about our defense running out of gas early in the game because we put them back on the field so quickly with the turnovers," Solich said. "It seemed to me like they were on the field forever. We could have been down by a number of points, but they played tremendously well.

"They played great football, but I was a little concerned about them wearing down. Whether they wore down in the second half, I don't know. Arizona has as many big-play people on the offensive side of it as any team we've faced. So they have a shot, if they get enough snaps, to make those big plays."

The second of the Wildcats' three Mark McDonald field goals, a 25-yarder with 52 seconds remaining in the first quarter, was set up by a 63-yard pass play from Smith to Brad Brennan, who also scored Arizona's first touchdown on a 15-yard pass on the first play of the fourth quarter.

That pass capped a 66-yard, 10-play drive against the Blackshirts.

Canidate carried five times for 39 yards during that series. Until then, the Wildcats had been stopped cold on the ground. "I think we did a pretty good job against the run all day," said Cornhusker rush end Mike Rucker, who was chosen as the game's outstanding defensive player.

"There were just a couple of times where we were in a certain defense, and they scrambled here and there, called the right play, and there were a couple of third-down plays where they got the first down, kept the chains going, and that came back to bite us in the end."

Arizona managed only 265 total yards, well below its season average of 444.9 per game. But 102 of the yards came in the fourth quarter. Even so, Rucker refused to use



Weakside linebacker Julius Jackson (above) wraps up Arizona quarterback Keith Smith as tackle Loran Kaiser moves in. Jackson, seeing extensive duty after starter Eric Johnson was injured, finished with six tackles, including two for losses. Rush end Mike Rucker, who was named the defensive player of the game, addresses the media after the game, along with coach Frank Solich (right).

fatigue as an excuse.

"Personally, I can tell you that I wasn't tired," he said.

Considering the lost fumbles, the block of a field goal attempt by Kris Brown and a 75-yard punt return by McAlister that would have been a touchdown had the Wildcats not been penalized for clipping, Nebraska was fortunate to still have an opportunity to win the game in the fourth quarter.

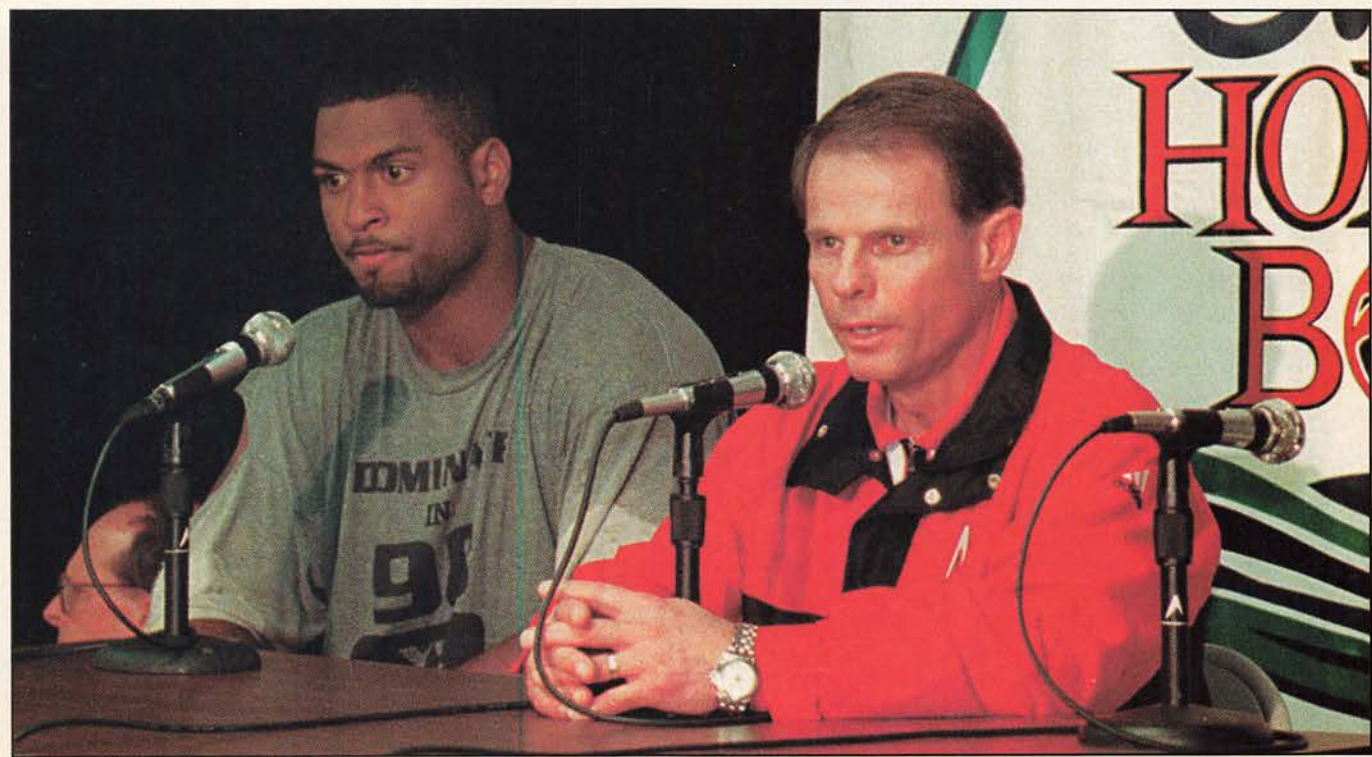
Nebraska's last real chance came on the series following the winning touchdown.

The seven-play series began at the Cornhusker 30-yard line and was kept alive by a 16-yard pass play

from Crouch to Davison on third-and-14. A 13-yard run by Crouch and a 4-yard run by fullback Joel Makovicka left Nebraska with second-and-6 from the Arizona 41-yard line.

The glimmer of hope faded when Crouch was tackled for a 5-yard loss and was extinguished on the next play when the omni-present McAlister intercepted a pass intended for Wiggins.

"That may have been the biggest play I've made in my whole career," said McAlister, who also blocked Brown's field goal attempt and recovered a fumble. "That sealed the game for us."



4TH & 1 INCHES

More News From The Nebraska-Arizona Game

SHOULDER INJURY SIDELINES JOHNSON

Eric Johnson, the Cornhuskers' starting weakside linebacker, suffered a separated left shoulder early in the second quarter. Johnson's shoulder also was separated during the final regular-season game against Colorado and required surgery that could sideline the junior from Phoenix in the spring.

Junior Julius Jackson picked up the slack, making six tackles, including two for losses of 12 yards.

KICK RETURNER WALKER MISSES GAME

Nebraska was without defensive back and kick returner Joe Walker, who suffered a knee injury, which required reconstructive surgery and probably will keep him out of spring practice.

TEAMMATES HONOR SPECIAL TEAMS STANDOUT

Senior fullback Billy Legate earned a reputation for being a head-hunter on the kickoff coverage team throughout his career. Legate showed that reputation was well-deserved late in the first half when he hit Arizona's Dennis Northcutt, forcing a fumble that he recovered at the Wildcat 10.

The Cornhuskers had to settle for a 23-yard, Kris Brown field goal as time expired.

Legate was chosen in a vote of his teammates to receive the Holiday Bowl Admiral's Trophy. The trophy is awarded to a member of each team for important contributions to its success. "Billy has been a valuable player for us," coach Frank Solich said in a prepared statement.

"It is a tremendous honor for him because it was chosen by his teammates."

MCBRIDE ACCEPTS RESPONSIBILITY

Nebraska defensive coordinator Charlie McBride accepted responsibility for problems the Blackshirts had. "I didn't do a good job, and early the things that we had a lot of success with, they picked apart on later. We've got to look at changing some things, maybe me, too," he said.

"There were just so many uncanny things that threw us off-balance that we were always on edge this year. All the time. And we weren't the defense we thought we should be."

Solich was asked to interpret McBride's "changing some things" remark.

"Over the course of the season, we've given up more big plays maybe than what we generally have," Solich replied. "I think in the Big 12 Conference, we ended up facing a number of teams that were really pretty balanced, and that's not necessarily been the way it's been."

"So I'm sure what he was talking about was just looking at the overall picture as to what we're going to be facing in the conference and then the way trends are going and making sure that we make the adjustments necessary to play good defensive football."

There are certainly no plans to scrap the 4-3 base alignment.

'HEALTHY' EVANS GETS FOUR CARRIES

I-back DeAngelo Evans, who had played in only three games in an injury-plagued sophomore season, was close to 100-percent healthy for the game. As a result, Solich said, he might play a lot.

"I feel healthy," Evans told reporters. "I feel as good as ever. I feel better about my football ability than I did when I came back for the Washington game, after 20 months between games."

He rushed for 146 yards and three touchdowns against the Huskies.

"When I am healthy, I am as good as anybody," Evans told the Lincoln Journal Star. "Anybody. (Texas's Heisman Trophy winner) Ricky Williams. Anybody."

Evans carried only four times for a 0-yard net against Arizona, however.

On his first carry, which was negated by a motion penalty, he gained 21 yards. ■

Arizona picked up one first down and forced Nebraska to exhaust its timeouts before punting and giving the Cornhuskers a final, desperation opportunity with 34 seconds remaining.

On first down from his own 27-yard line, Crouch threw down the field to Kenny Cheatham, who made a diving attempt near the Arizona 35. Even if he had caught it, he was out-of-bounds.

On second down, Crouch passed to Billy Haafke at the Nebraska 35-yard line. But Haafke had to dive for the pass and came down in-bounds, which meant the clock continued to run.

The Southeastern Conference officials were slow in spotting the ball as precious seconds ran off the clock. Crouch took the snap in the shotgun and downed the ball with 4 seconds left.

The Cornhuskers' time management left much to be desired.

Arizona called timeout to set its defense for the final play of what would be the most successful football season in its history — and the first four-loss season at Nebraska since 1968.

The Cornhuskers had one last gasp.

They sent three receivers split wide to Crouch's right and one to his left. He took the snap in a shotgun formation, dropped back to his own 23-yard line and heaved the ball.

There was irony in that desperation pass, the final play of Solich's first season as head coach. It was a season that had begun with such promise — and a 12-yard run by Makovicka. ■

1998 Record (9-4)

Aug. 29	vs. Louisiana Tech\$	W, 56-27
Sept. 5	Ala.-Birmingham	W, 38-7
Sept. 12	@ California	W, 24-3
Sept. 26	Washington	W, 55-7
Oct. 3	vs. Oklahoma St.&	W, 24-17
Oct. 10	@ Texas A&M	L, 28-21
Oct. 17	Kansas	W, 41-0
Oct. 24	Missouri	W, 20-13
Oct. 31	Texas	L, 20-16
Nov. 7	@ Iowa St.	W, 42-7
Nov. 14	@ Kansas St.	L, 40-30
Nov. 27	Colorado	W, 16-14
Dec. 30	Arizona%	L, 23-20

\$ Eddie Robinson Football Classic • Memorial Stadium • Lincoln, Neb.
& Arrowhead Stadium • Kansas City, Mo.
% Holiday Bowl • San Diego, Calif.

"Both teams played hard for four quarters, and it's just unfortunate that we had to lose. The way I feel about it is . . . I just kind of want to say I'm sorry to the seniors. This is not the way I had planned it. I had planned it for them to go out winners, but it's not the end of the world or anything. There are a lot of things we can learn from this game."

— Quarterback Eric Crouch



Briefly . . .

■ Nebraska missed an opportunity to even its bowl-game record, now 17-19.

■ "Wilma the Wildcat," an Arizona mascot, fell off the dock and into the water during a visit to the 32nd Street Naval Station. Fortunately, "Wilma" came through relatively unscathed.

■ Arizona seemed to be the more relaxed of the teams. The Wildcat practices were open to reporters, and players were readily accessible. As is customary, Nebraska's practices were closed.

■ Tickets were in great demand, much to the delight of Holiday Bowl organizers. The game's 70,500 tickets all were sold, and the attendance of 65,354 was a Holiday Bowl game record.

The previous record was 61,892, set in 1987 when Iowa defeated Wyoming 20-19.

■ Quarterback Bobby Newcombe originally planned to join the team in San Diego but changed his mind and stayed home in Albuquerque, N.M. He's recovering from knee surgery. ■

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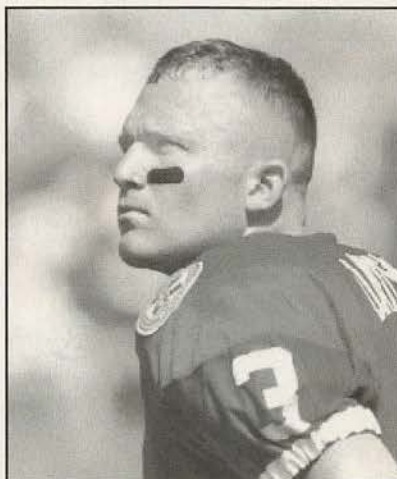
Nebraska vs Arizona
Holiday Bowl • Dec. 30, 1998 • San Diego, Calif.

Score By Quarters

Arizona	6	3	0	14	—	23
Nebraska	0	13	0	7	—	20

Team Stats

	UA	NU
First Downs	16	12
Rushing	10	5
Passing	5	7
Penalty	1	0
Rushing Attempts	44	34
Yards Gained Rushing	167	128
Yards Lost Rushing	60	41
Net Yards Rushing	107	87
Net Yards Passing	158	193
Passes Attempted	23	28
Passes Completed	12	12
Had Intercepted	0	2
Total Plays	67	62
Total Net Yards	265	280
Avg. Gain Per Play	4.0	4.5
Fumbles-Lost	4-3	4-2
Penalties-Yards	7-59	2-6
Punts-Yards	7-252	6-235
Avg. Per Punt	36.0	39.2
Punt Returns-Yards	3-28	3-6
Interceptions-Yards	2-42	0-0
Fumble Returns-Yards	3-0	3-0
Kickoff Returns-Yards	4-71	5-88
Possession Time	32:34	27:26



Sophomore Matt Davison had three catches for 64 yards in the bowl game and led Nebraska with 32 catches for the season.

Individual Leaders

NEBRASKA

RUSHING					
Name	Att.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Crouch, E.	15	28	1.9	23	0
Makovicka, J.	5	26	5.2	17	0
Buckhalter, C.	8	22	2.8	8	0
Christo, M.	2	11	5.5	14	0
Evans	4	0	0.0	2	0

PASSING				
Name	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD
Crouch, E.	12-28-2	42.8	193	2

RECEIVING					
Name	No.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Wistrom, T.	3	41	13.7	33	1
Buckhalter, C.	1	3	3.0	3	0
Davison, M.	3	64	21.3	24	0
Wiggins, S.	1	45	45.0	45	1
Cheatham, K.	2	16	8.0	10	0
Makovicka, J.	1	22	22.0	22	0
Haafke, B.	1	8	8.0	8	0

PUNTING				
Name	No.	Yds.	Avg.	LNG
Lafleur, B.	6	235	39.2	259

FIELD GOALS			
Name	Att.	Good	LNG
Brown, C.	3	2	25

PUNT RETURNS					
Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Wiggins, S.	2	1	0.5	1	0
Brown, L.	1	5	5.0	5	0

KICKOFF RETURNS					
Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Wiggins, S.	4	81	20.2	31	0
Wistrom, T.	1	7	7.0	7	0

DEFENSE							
Name	UT	AT	TT	FL	Int.	Sacks	
Brown, M.	11	0	11	1-2	0	0	
Rucker, M.	7	0	7	4-14	0	1-9	
Ortiz, T.	6	0	6	1-1	0	0	
Jackson, J.	6	0	6	2-12	0	0	
Foreman, J.	5	0	5	0	0	0	
Kelsay, C.	4	0	4	1-15	0	0	
Wiltz, J.	4	0	4	2-10	0	1-5	
Johnson, E.	3	0	3	0	0	0	
Legate, B.	3	0	3	0	0	0	

ARIZONA

RUSHING					
Name	Att.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Candidate, T.	22	101	4.6	16	0
Smith, K.	11	25	2.3	20	0
Eafon, K.	5	14	2.8	5	1
Northcutt, D.	1	-15	-15.0	-15	0
Jenkins, O.	5	-18	-3.6	6	0

PASSING				
Name	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD
Smith, K.	11-19-0	57.9	143	1
Jenkins, O.	1-4-0	25.0	15	0

RECEIVING					
Name	No.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Northcutt, D.	4	47	11.8	26	0
McDaniel, J.	1	9	9.0	9	0
Brennan, B.	2	78	39.0	63	1
Nash	1	4	4.0	4	0
Lucky, M.	1	15	15.0	15	0
Eafon, K.	1	-7	-7.0	-7	0
Shields, P.	2	12	6.0	7	0

PUNTING				
Name	No.	Yds.	Avg.	LNG
Springston, R.	7	252	36.0	37

FIELD GOALS			
Name	Att.	Good	LNG
McDonald, M.	3	3	48

PUNT RETURNS					
Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Northcutt, D.	3	24	8.0	16	0
McAlister, C.	0	4	4.0	4	0

KICKOFF RETURNS					
Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Northcutt, D.	2	37	18.5	22	0
McAlister, C.	2	34	17.0	20	0

DEFENSE							
Name	UT	AT	TT	FL	Int.	Sacks	
Ball, M.	9	1	10	2-21	0	0	
Polk, D.	5	0	5	3-6	0	1-2	
Payne, G.	5	0	5	0	0	0	
McAlister, C.	4	0	4	0	2-42	0	
Jones, R.	4	0	4	0	0	0	
Greer, D.	3	0	3	2-7	0	1-2	

'98 SEASON STATS

(12 GAMES — Not including bowl)

RUSHING

Name	G	Att.	Yds.	YPG	TD
Buckhalter, C.	12	142	799	66.6	8
Crouch, E.	8	96	459	57.4	5
Makovicka, J.	12	97	458	38.2	2
Alexander, D.	9	70	369	41.0	4
Newcombe, B.	6	83	228	38.0	8
Christo, M.	3	59	223	31.9	3
Evans, D.	3	38	218	72.7	4
Miller, W.	12	19	96	8.0	2
Runtz, J.	4	3	59	14.8	0
Wiggins, S.	12	8	47	3.9	0
Legate, B.	11	5	28	2.5	1
White, D.	6	7	27	4.5	0
Brown, L.	6	1	13	2.2	0
Kingston, B.	3	3	9	3.0	0
Tillery, A.	1	1	3	3.0	0
Gragert, N.	1	1	3	3.0	0
Stanislav, J.	1	1	1	1.0	0
London, F.	7	1	-2	-0.3	0

PASSING

Name	G	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD
Crouch, E.	8	49-101-4	48.5	601	4
Newcombe, B.	6	50-79-1	63.3	712	1
Christo, M.	7	19-28-0	67.9	261	2

RECEIVING

Name	G	No.	Yds.	YPC	YPG	TD
Davison, M.	12	32	394	12.3	27.2	0
Wiggins, S.	12	22	326	14.8	6.3	1
Jackson, S.	12	19	343	18.1	28.8	4
Cheatham, K.	9	13	155	11.9	17.2	1
Buckhalter, C.	12	13	88	6.8	7.3	0
Haafke, B.	12	6	54	9.0	4.5	0
Makovicka, J.	12	4	67	16.8	5.6	0
Brown, L.	6	3	24	8.0	4.0	0
Evans, D.	3	3	23	7.7	7.7	0
Wistrom, T.	12	2	84	42.0	7.0	1
DeBates, T.J.	10	1	16	16.0	1.6	0

FIELD GOALS

Name	G	Att.	Good	Long
Brown, K.	12	21	14	48

DEFENSE

Name	G	UT	AT	TT	FL	Int.	S/Yds.
Brown, M.	12	37	65	102	5-5	1-1	0
Foreman, J.	12	32	65	97	7-27	0	3-22
Kelsay, C.	12	33	39	72	14-52	1-0	5-39
Johnson, E.	12	33	37	70	11-52	0	6-41
Swiney, E.	12	32	29	61	4-16	0	2-12
Rucker, M.	12	21	32	53	9-21	0	1.5-12
Walker, J.	12	22	28	50	5-10	3-65	0
Ortiz, T.	11	20	26	46	9-28	0	1-3
Brown, R.	12	27	19	46	2-3	2-60	0
Kaiser, L.	12	16	24	40	10-27	0	5.5-21
Shaw, B.	12	12	27	39	4-11	0	1-6
Wiltz, J.	10	10	25	35	1-7	2-32	1-7
Finley, C.	9	6	22	28	3-13	3-63	0
Vanden Bosch, K.	12	10	18	28	4-36	0	2-29
Warren, S.	10	10	16	26	1-3	0	0
Jackson, J.	10	9	15	24	3-20	0	2-19
Craver, K.	11	10	13	23	0	1-0	0
Polk, C.	12	13	9	22	5-24	1-15	1-10
Wills, A.	11	5	5	10	0	0	0
Kohl, J.	12	4	6	10	1-3	0	0
Slechta, J.	8	3	6	9	3-11	0	1-7
Toline, T.	12	5	4	9	0	0	0
Reynolds, K.	6	5	3	8	1-5	0	0
Lohr, J.	11	5	2	7	1-6	0	1-6
Burrow, J.	12	2	2	4	0	0	0
Vedral, M.	6	1	2	3	0	0	0
Legate, B.	11	1	2	3	0	0	0
Woodward, W.	10	1	2	3	0	0	0
Watchorn, T.	9	1	2	3	0	0	0
Raymond, S.	3	3	0	3	0	0	0
McGraw, G.	11	1	2	3	0	0	0
Ryan, E.	3	0	2	2	1-2	0	0
Wichmann, J.P.	3	1	1	2	0	0	0
Booker, D.	11	2	0	2	0	0	0
Mehl, L.	1	0	1	1	1-3	0	0
Tuttle, C.	2	0	1	1	0	0	0
McGinn, M.	1	0	1	1	0	0	0
Fischer, E.	2	1	0	1	0	0	0
Mooberry, B.	3	1	0	1	0	0	0
Hogrefe, Q.	1	0	1	1	0	0	0

TEAM STATISTICS

	NU	OPP
Total Offensive Yards	4,619	3,764
Plays	844	813
Average Per Play	5.5	4.6
Average Per Game	384.9	313.7
Net Rushing Yards	3,045	1,402
Attempts	636	466
TDs Rushing	37	8
Net Passing Yards	1,574	2,362
Attempts	208	347
Completions	118	174
Average Per Pass	7.6	6.8
Average Per Catch	13.3	13.6
Average Per Game	131.2	196.8
TDs Passing	7	13
Sacks By-Yards	35-233	20-146
Fumbles-Lost	27-13	30-13
Penalties-Yards	61-536	103-830

Scoring					
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	OT TOT
NU	83	106	89	105	0 383
Opponents	28	53	49	53	0 183

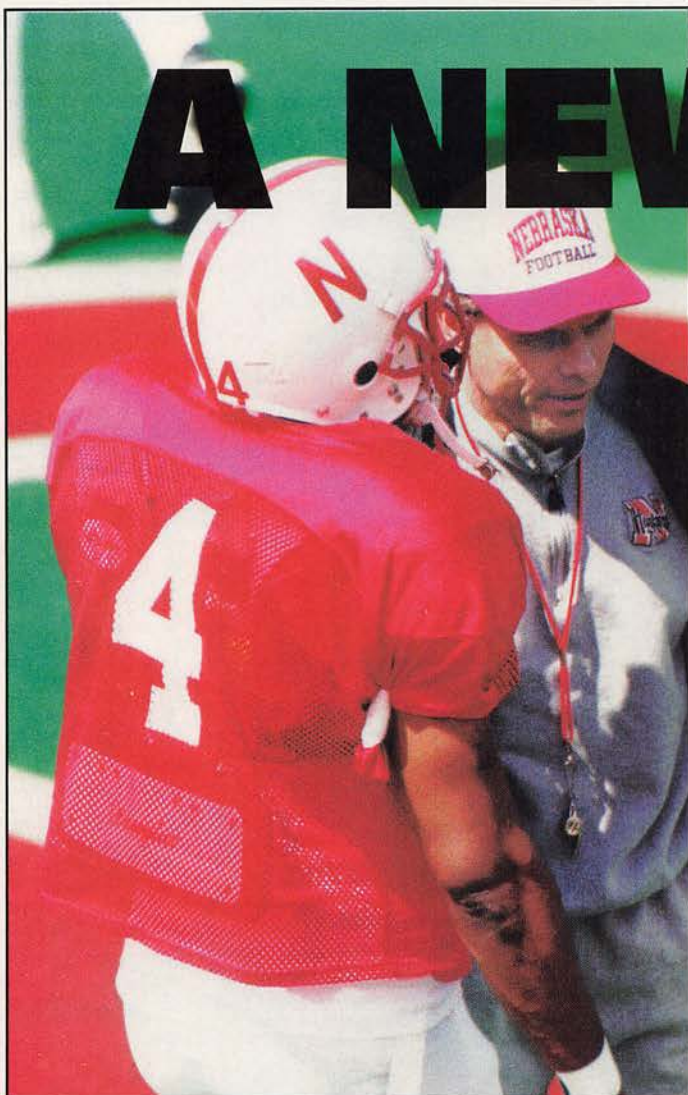


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A NEW ERA



LITTLE DID HE KNOW

Frank Solich couldn't have envisioned the effect injuries would have on his first team.

"When you start with a new quarterback, a new starting I-back and four offensive line starters, there are some questions," he said at the Big 12 media gathering in Dallas in late July.

"But we are three-deep at I-back . . . and our quarterbacks, Bobby Newcombe and Eric Crouch, have the potential to be very exciting. How well that all works remains to be seen."

Nebraska needed all three I-backs, as well as a third quarterback — senior walkon Monte Christo, who came off the bench in the Missouri victory and started the Texas game.

Newcombe and Crouch were very exciting. But Newcombe suffered a knee injury in the opener and was never healthy, while Crouch was slowed by hip pointer and a sore hamstring.

At I-back, DeAngelo Evans played in only three regular-season games because of a knee injury and a bruised tailbone. Dan Alexander, who came on to play well against Iowa State, earned a start at Kansas State, only to suffer a knee injury, leaving Correll Buckhalter to shoulder the load.

Ralph Brown was right. Troy Edwards was "a good receiver," Brown said prior to the Nebraska football team's season-opener against Louisiana Tech in the Eddie Robinson Classic.

"I think if we don't prepare for him, he'll give us a lot of trouble."

Even though the Cornhuskers did prepare for Edwards, it was to little or no avail. He caught 21 passes for an NCAA single-game record 405 yards and three touchdowns.

Despite his performance, however, Nebraska won 56-27.

So began Frank Solich's tenure as Cornhusker head coach.

Edwards would win the Biletnikoff Award as the nation's top collegiate receiver, while Solich's first Nebraska team would finish the regular season with a 9-3 record.

The defending national champion Cornhuskers went into the season ranked No. 4 in the Associated Press poll and No. 3 in the ESPN/USA Today coaches' poll. They spent three weeks ranked No. 2 in both polls before dropping to No. 8 following a 28-21 loss at Texas A&M.

Three weeks later, Nebraska dropped out of the Top 10 as a result of a 20-16 loss against Texas. The loss ended a 47-game winning streak at Memorial Stadium, dating to Sept. 21, 1991.

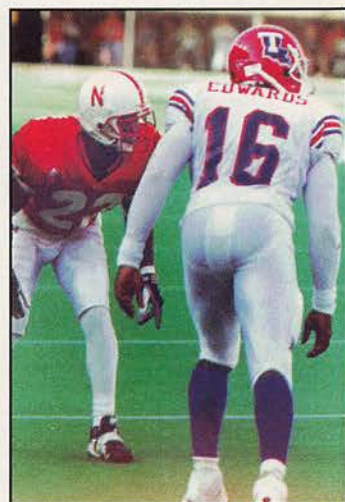
Even though the Cornhuskers came up short of a second consecutive national championship, and a fourth in five seasons, they could hardly be faulted for their effort.

As Solich's predecessor, Tom Osborne, regularly pointed out, what matters most in athletics is the journey not the destination. And Nebraska scored high on that count. The Cornhuskers were nothing if not entertaining. The outcomes of six games weren't determined until the final minutes.

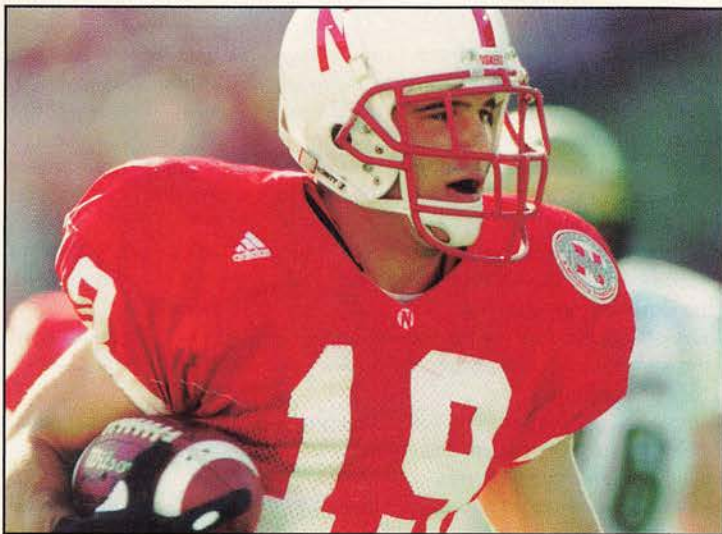
Two of their victories went down to the final play.

The Louisiana Tech game established a pattern for the season. Edwards had a big day, but Nebraska prevailed. It was good-news-bad-news season from the opening kickoff.

On balance, of course, the news was good. With that in mind, here are some of the highlights, and a few of the lowlights, during the dawn of a new era in Cornhusker football.



BEST AND WORST OF '98



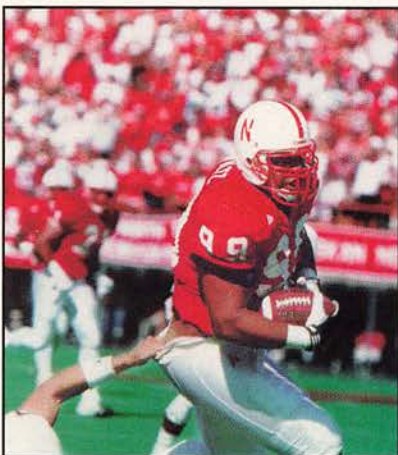
NO OFFENSE, BUT . . .

Going into the season, there was speculation that the defense might have to carry Nebraska early on while the inexperienced offense developed. "We like to think the defense will help the offense with good field position and big plays," Coach Frank Solich said in Dallas in late July.

During the regular season, the Blackshirts produced 27 turnovers, which were converted into 109 points — 14 touchdowns and four field goals. The defense scored three of the touchdowns, on interception returns by Joe Walker and Clint Finley and a fumble return by Ralph Brown.

The defense was inconsistent, however, allowing six touchdowns on plays of 41 yards or more. The Cornhuskers allowed 29 plays of 25 yards or more, 10 of them in the three losses.

All but four of the plays of 25 yards or more were passes.

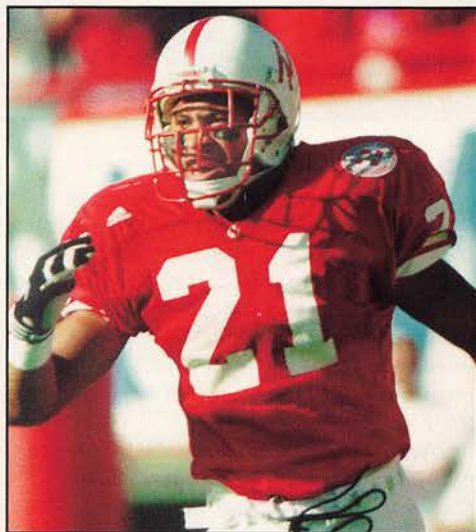


TACKLE THIS

Senior Jason Wiltz intercepted passes against Louisiana Tech and Washington to set a single-season record for Cornhusker defensive tackles. After three games, he led the team.

"It's probably pretty scary, going down through the interception stats," said rush end Chad Kelsay. "You see a guy 6-foot-1, 185, then one 6-foot-4, 310 . . . that doesn't go together real well."

The 6-foot-4, 310-pound Wiltz returned the first interception 27 yards and the second 5 yards.



CAN'T KEEP A GOOD MAN DOWN

Junior weakside linebacker Eric Johnson, who shared the team lead in quarterback sacks with six for 41 yards in losses, had to pop a shoulder back into place three times before coming out of the Colorado game. Despite the pain, however, he showed up for post-game interviews with a smile.

That's his nature, according to defensive coordinator Charlie McBride.

"The thing that's nice about having a guy like that is, this is fun. Every practice is fun. Roger Craig was that way," said McBride.

One thing was certain, Johnson wasn't about to come out of the Colorado game until he was forced to. "I didn't want to let the seniors down," he said afterward, his shoulder in a sling.

The trainers had to hide his pads to keep him on the sideline, he said.



CONSIDER THE EVIDENCE

Sophomore defensive back Joe Walker wasn't bragging. He was stating a fact.

"The more I'm on the field, the more I'm going to produce," he said.

Walker produced three touchdowns in 1998, on a 65-yard interception return against Iowa State, a 73-yard punt return against Oklahoma State and a 99-yard kickoff return against Louisiana Tech.

Only four other players in NCAA Division IA history have scored at least one touchdown on a punt return, a kickoff return and an interception return in the same season.

SURE TACKLER

Junior Mike Brown, who played both rover and free safety in 1998, was credited with 19 tackles in the loss against Texas. His total was the most by a Cornhusker since 1981, when linebacker Brent Evans was involved in 19 tackles during a 31-15 victory against Kansas at Memorial Stadium.

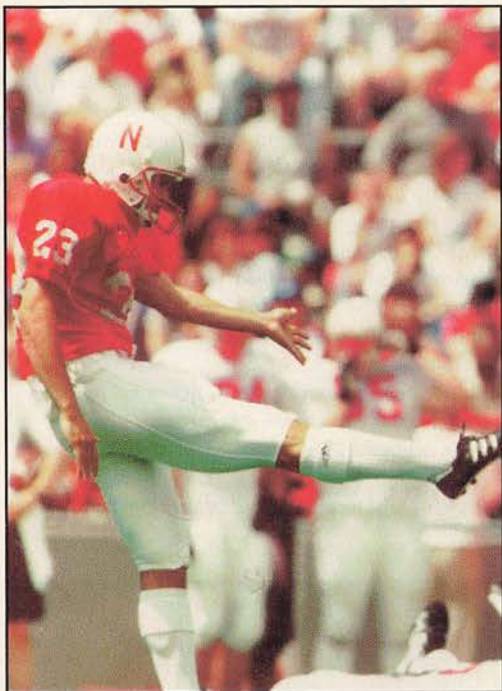
Middle guard Rich Glover's 22 tackles in the 1971 "Game of the Century" is considered the modern school record, although the late Tom Novak — who died in 1998 — must have set the record during a 31-0 loss at Notre Dame in 1947 — if newspaper accounts of the game are to be believed.

According to one account, Novak was in on 17 tackles during one 21-play stretch.

Brown finished the regular season as the team's leading tackler with 102, the most by a Cornhusker since 1983, when linebacker Mike Knox had 125, and the most-ever by a defensive back.

The previous record for a Nebraska defensive back was 87 tackles by Steve Carmer in 1991.

Brown's 102 were the 12th-most at Nebraska since 1965, as far back as tackle statistics go.



GOT HIS KICKS

Senior Bill Lafleur, a walkon from Norfolk, saved his best for last, punting five times for a season-best 51-yard average in the regular-season finale against Colorado. His final punt in the game was a 58-yarder, which left the Buffaloes at their own 9-yard line with 2:57 remaining.

Lafleur finished the season with a school-record 44.9 yards-per-punt average. The previous record (44.7) was set by Jesse Kosch in 1996. Kosch, also a walkon, was his predecessor.

Setting the record was "important to me, I guess," Lafleur said following the Colorado game. "Going into this season, there were a lot of questions (about the Cornhuskers' punting).

"You kind of take that as a personal challenge. I knew if I worked hard during the summer, I could produce. So I was real happy with the way this season turned out for me."

Lafleur, who had punted only four times total in three previous seasons, punted 52 times in 1998, the second-most by a Cornhusker in the last 22 seasons. Mike Stigge punted 53 times in 1992.

Lafleur thought he might be busy. "I knew there was a possibility we'd be punting more than normal," he said. "That's good and bad. After five years, I'd like the opportunity to play."

"But you want the team to do as well as possible, too."

Lafleur was well behind the school record for punts in a season. Dana Stephenson, who also played defensive back, punted 69 times in 1967 — and that was in only 10 games.

OH BROTHER

Tracey Wistrom's future at Nebraska is bright. "As he adds weight, he will become a devastating player," Cornhusker receivers coach Ron Brown told the Lincoln Journal Star in early October.

At 6-foot-5 and 218 pounds, the redshirted freshman from Webb City, Mo., looked more like a wide receiver than a tight end. But he got the most out of "every pound he has," according to Brown.

Wistrom, an aggressive blocker, caught only two passes during the regular season, but the first, from Monte Christo, was good for 63 yards and a touchdown against Alabama-Birmingham.

Wistrom is the brother of former Cornhusker Grant Wistrom, of course.

Nebraska had three brother combinations on the 1998 team: Chad and Chris Kelsay, Aaron and Colin Wills and Seth and Sam Gutz. In addition to Tracey Wistrom, Joel Makovicka (Jeff), Mark Vedral (Jon, Mike), Dion Booker (Michael) and Tyrone Uhlir (Todd) all followed brothers at Nebraska.



THERE MUST BE A CATCH

Sophomore split end Matt Davison led the Cornhuskers in pass receptions in 1998 with 32, for a team-high 394 yards. Davison's reception total was the highest at Nebraska since 1983, when All-American wingback Irving Fryar caught 40 passes for 780 yards and eight touchdowns.

The only other Nebraska player to catch at least 30 passes during that time was tight end Johnny Mitchell, with 31 receptions for 534 yards and five touchdowns in 1991.

"I'm a little skinny kid running around out there," said Davison, who's listed at 6-feet tall and 180 pounds. "Sometimes, I think I'm a target because they (defensive backs) know they can take me out. I get teased about it all the time. Our own defense will ask me: 'How do you get open?'"

Davison's stock answer: "I guess I'm just a little bit smarter."

After two seasons, he ranks 25th in career receptions at Nebraska with 43.



OOPS

Senior quarterback Monte Christo came away from the Missouri game with a black eye, suffered when he was punched in a pileup. He wouldn't make any accusations afterward, however.

All he would say was: "It's kind of hard to get a black eye when you've got a facemask."

OOPS II

Redshirted freshman quarterback Eric Crouch's head was nearly twisted off by Kansas State linebacker Travis Ochs. But the officials didn't call Ochs for a facemask penalty.

"My neck is a lot more flexible than I thought it was," said Crouch. "It looked a lot worse after I got done watching it. As it was happening, I definitely knew it was a facemask. But it didn't get called, and those are just parts of the game. I had to go from there. I wasn't going to argue with the ref."

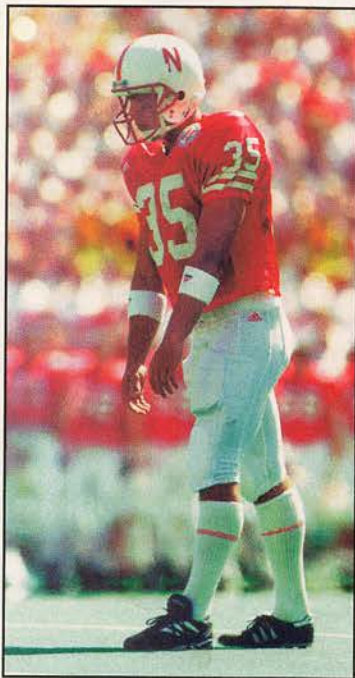
SIMPLY THE BEST

It was the best of times, and the worst of times. Senior placekicker Kris Brown saw his school record for consecutive extra-point kicks (125) come to an end in the Kansas State loss and his school record for consecutive field goals made (17) come to an end in the victory at California.

But he finished his career as the Cornhuskers' all-time leading scorer with 388 points.

Brown broke the NCAA record for extra points, with 216, and he tied the NCAA record for extra-point attempts, with 220. Fresno State's Derek Mahoney (1990-93) held both records previously.

He finished fifth on the NCAA career kick-scoring list.



THEY DIDN'T WALK ON BY

Nebraska remains a haven for players willing to walk on and pay their own way. The pre-Colorado depth chart included 28 players who originally walked on. Six started at least once during the season: fullback Joel Makovicka, offense tackle Jason Schwab, punter Bill Lafleur, strong-side linebacker Brian Shaw, quarterback Monte Christo and offensive tackle and guard Ben Gessford.

The NCAA inclination to restrict walkons would have more of an impact on the Cornhuskers than on most. "Certainly if there's a lid on the number of players you can have on your football team, then without question, that would affect us and affect us dramatically," said Coach Frank Solich.

"There are a lot of players out there who want a chance, who want to be part of a program, and some of them are really very fine athletes when you turn on the film (to evaluate them).

"That's where we've benefitted, from some of those guys developing into great players as they've come through the system and matured. Without question, that has been an important part of this program for a lot of years, really ever since Bob Devaney showed up in 1962."

MEDIA MISTAKE

In July, Big 12 area media members picked Nebraska to win the conference's north division, even though Kansas State was picked as high as second nationally in preseason publications.

Cornhusker coach Frank Solich said he was surprised, considering the number of returning starters his team had compared to the number of returning starters other teams in the division had.

The media did select Texas A&M to win the south division, however, as well as selecting Texas running back Ricky Williams, the Heisman Trophy winner, as the conference offensive player of the year and Texas A&M linebacker Dat Nguyen as the conference defensive player of the year.



BIG MAK

Joel Makovicka ran 9 yards for a touchdown to cap a 10-play, 66-yard drive with 4:39 remaining as the Cornhuskers tried unsuccessfully to come back from a 21-point deficit at Texas A&M.

The touchdown was Makovicka's second, and last, of the season, evidence of the fact that opposing defenses were geared toward stopping the senior fullback from tiny Ulysses, Ne.

The touchdown against Texas A&M was the 13th in Makovicka's four seasons, giving him the Cornhusker career record for fullbacks. Tom Rathman (1981-85) and Bill Thornton (1960-62) shared the previous record of 12. Makovicka was the team's third-leading rusher, with 458 yards on 97 carries (4.7 per carry), and he finished third all-time among Nebraska fullbacks with 1,447 yards.

"The thing about Joel is, he can do just about anything," quarterback Bobby Newcombe said. "He's a great blocker. He can catch the ball real well. And he can run the ball real well."

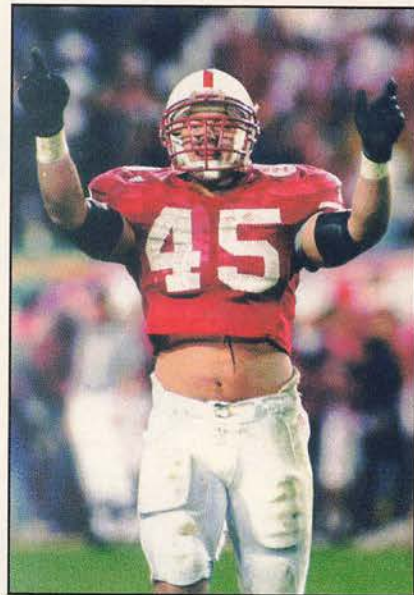
Makovicka's running ability was such that he took snaps at I-back during practice late in the season, after Dan Alexander was sidelined by a knee injury suffered against Kansas State.

"From a speed standpoint, maybe he wouldn't quite fit the prototype of what we would look for as an I-back," running backs coach Dave Gillespie said prior to the season.

"But I have no doubt that if we lined 'Mak' up at I-back, he would be proficient."

And it nearly came to that.

Makovicka carried on the first play from scrimmage during the Frank Solich era, by the way, gaining 12 yards over right guard. Solich, of course, is a former Cornhusker fullback.



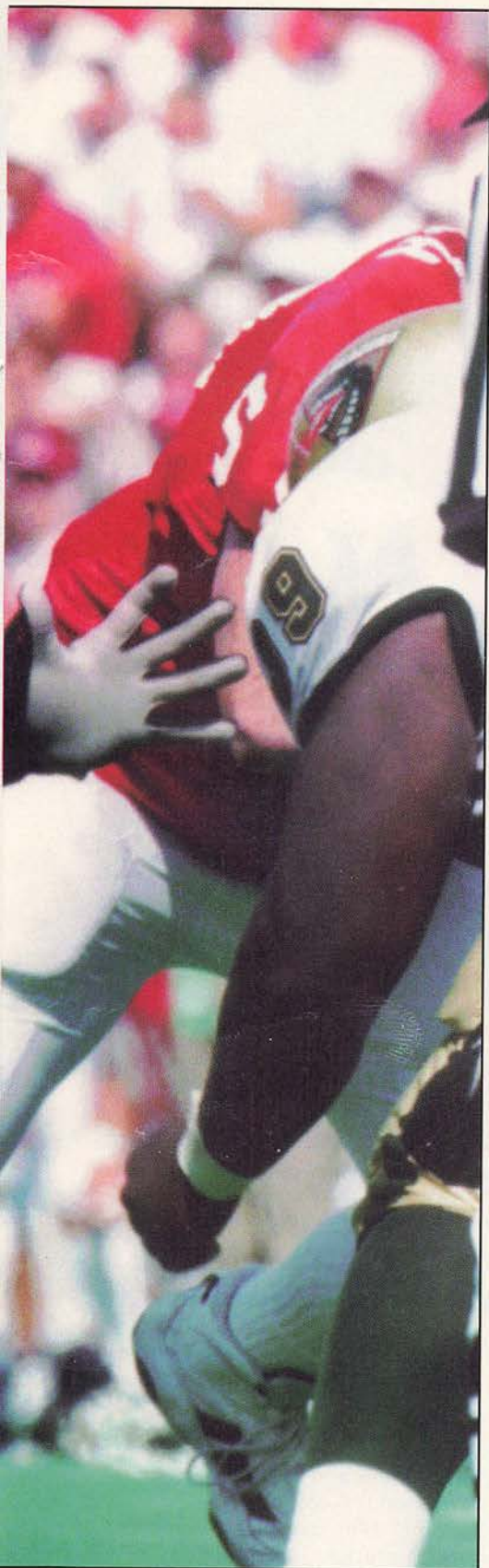
SUCH GOOD FRIENDS

Sophomore Bobby Newcombe and redshirted freshman Eric Crouch became friends when they arrived at Nebraska in the fall of 1997, and they have remained friends, despite competing at the same position. "Bobby and I have (developed) a pretty good friendship over the last two years," said Crouch.

"We could have taken it two ways. We could either be enemies and teammates and handle it that way, or we could be friends and teammates and try to handle it that way. I think both of us just kind of knew that the best thing to do would be friends and try to help each other out as much as possible."



Nebraska's running game sputtered in 1998, and the inexperienced offensive line took the rap



Dominic Raiola, who played as a back-up at both guards and center in addition to being the No. 1 deep-snapper, has been described as the Cornhuskers' next outstanding offensive lineman.

Hopes Online In '99

By Mike Babcock

Early in the third quarter of Nebraska's 16-14 victory against Colorado, Cornhusker I-back Correll Buckhalter broke an off-tackle play for 52 yards to the Colorado 3-yard line.

Most in the Memorial Stadium crowd of nearly 76,000 took for granted that Nebraska would come away with a touchdown. Six points seemed automatic. But it was not to be.

On first down, Buckhalter was tackled for a 2-yard loss.

On second down, quarterback Eric Crouch was sacked for a 7-yard loss.

And on third down, a hurried Crouch pass fell incomplete.

"We just botched three plays in a row and ended up settling for a field goal," Cornhusker offensive line coach Milt Tenopir said, recalling the sequence several weeks later.

"The line did one of the three, but other areas broke down, too."

A lineman missed a block on the second-down sack. On the other two plays, however, linemen weren't responsible for the breakdown. "So sometimes it's a bum rap," said Tenopir. "The kids understand that. They understand it takes more than

just five people to put the ball in the end zone."

The "kids" to whom Tenopir referred were men, of course — and big men at that. But figuratively speaking, considering their lack of experience, most of them were kids in 1998.

Only two of the offensive linemen who played in the Holiday Bowl were seniors, which means the other nine listed on the pre-bowl depth chart will be returning next season.

Six of those nine "played some" in 1998, and five started at least once.

That's in marked contrast to this season, when there were four new starters in the offensive interior. "It's hard for me to explain what exactly it means to be a first-time starter," Tenopir said.

"I don't care if you're a freshman, sophomore, junior or senior, the intensity, the quick recall you have to have is something you acquire. It's not something that's automatically there."

Consider Jason Schwab, a walkon from Eagan, Minn., who started every game at right tackle. Schwab had seen limited action in 10 games as a sophomore the previous season.

So he wasn't starting from scratch. But "it takes a lot of repetitions, normally game repetitions," said Tenopir.

"You can get better footwork-wise in practice. But it's not nearly as intense as it is in ballgames. Once he got comfortable, being sure of himself, where he was going, he got better and better."

Schwab improved enough to earn All-Big 12 honorable mention from conference coaches.

Success in the offensive line depends on more than strength and aggression, although those are certainly important qualities for a lineman. "It's a more precise deal than just saying: 'Go whip that guy.' If they don't do it in the proper fashion, they aren't going to whip him," said Tenopir.

"They're going to look silly because somebody will slant or loop on them. So the footwork and all that, it's critical that it's second-nature. They don't have a couple of minutes to think about it."

Offensive linemen have to be able to "think on the run and react on the run."

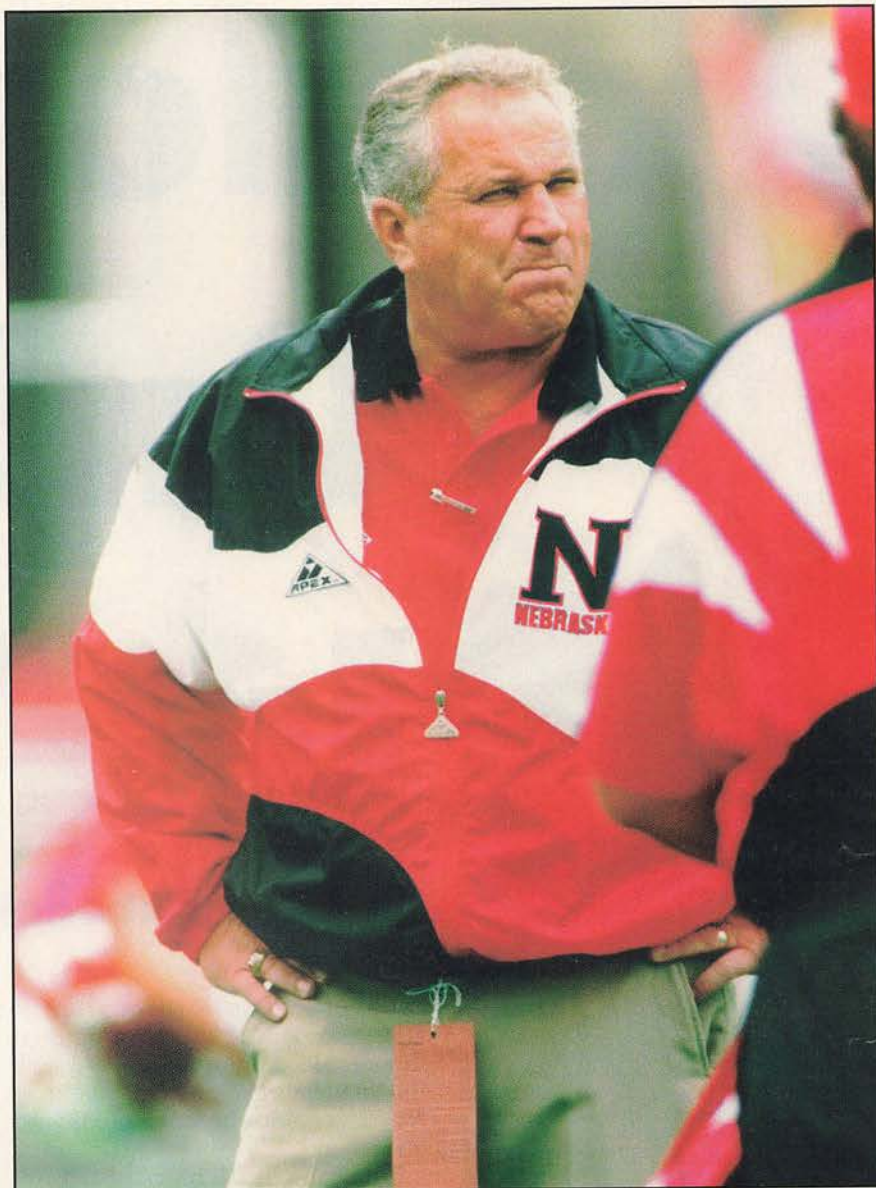
Left tackle Adam Julch, like Schwab a first-year starter as a junior, had to deal with an ankle problem throughout the season in addition to becoming accustomed to the intensity.

Julch suffered a dislocated right ankle in the spring game and was never completely healthy, according to Tenopir. Even so, he started every game but one. "Quite honestly, he never played a game without pain," Tenopir said. "But he played. He did the best he could do in a year when we needed him."

"You hate to play a guy who is sub-par, but it wasn't anything that was threatening as far as getting worse. It was just one of those deals where, unless you could lay him out a month in the middle of the season to get all the soreness out of it . . . I mean, that wasn't ever going to happen."

Left guard James Sherman, yet another junior, played through a knee problem and started all but one game this season, finishing second to Heskeu in "pancake" or knock-down blocks with 88.

Third-year sophomore Russ Hochstein and redshirted freshman Dominic Raiola came on strong as the season progressed, with Hochstein starting the last three regular-season games at right guard and Raiola getting his first collegiate



Milt Tenopir has seen how much some young linemen can improve in his 25 years as offensive line coach. Nebraska has won 11 NCAA rushing titles during that period, and his players have won six Outland Trophies and two Lombardi Awards.

"We'll get back to the level we're accustomed to would be my guess."

— Milt Tenopir

start in place of an injured Sherman against Colorado.

Raiola, who played as a back-up at both guards and center in addition to being the No. 1 deep-snapper, has been described as the Cornhuskers' next outstanding offensive lineman.

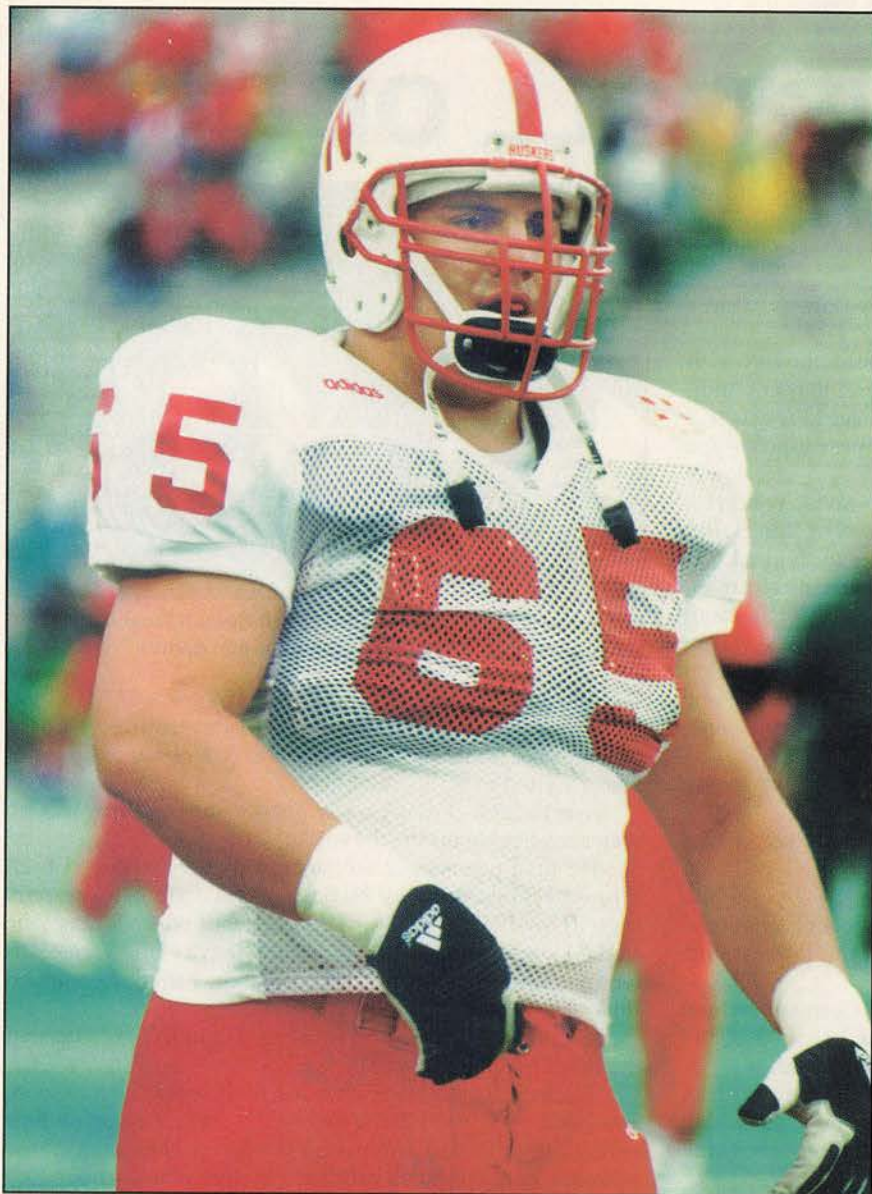
Tenopir doesn't dismiss that. "Dominic will be a great center if we choose to put him there," he said. "And he'll be a great guard if we leave him there. He just has a burning desire to excel."

Raiola has potential comparable to former Nebraska Outland Trophy

winners Aaron Taylor, Zach Wiegert, Will Shields, Dean Steinkuhler and Dave Rimington — who won it twice.

But then "so does Hochstein," said Tenopir. "I think Russ is as intense of a guy as we have. He has the right temperament to be an offensive lineman. He's a laid-back guy until the whistle blows and the ball is snapped. Both of those kids are going to be exceptional before they leave."

Raiola typically got one series a game at center, according to Tenopir. But he could be moved



Jason Schwab, who had seen limited action in 10 games as a sophomore the previous season, started every game at right tackle. He improved enough to earn All-Big 12 honorable mention from conference coaches.

there permanently during the spring to replace Heskew, a first-team all-conference honoree.

If Raiola settles in at center, Matt Baldwin, a senior-to-be, would probably be used in a "dual role, some guard and some center, kind of like we did with (Matt) Hoskinson," Tenopir said.

Hoskinson, a senior on the 1997 national championship team, was invaluable as the top back-up at both guard positions and center, and was considered a sixth interior starter.

"It's not so tough to do inside because the guards and center work together on so many things they at least understand the mental part," said Tenopir. "But you'd like to get

away from that. We've got three or four other guys who could figure in there. It all depends on what kind of winters they have."

Those to whom he referred include redshirted freshmen Dave Volk, who practiced some with the first offensive line late in the season, Kyle Kollmorgen and Jon Rutherford, all of whom played enough to earn letters in 1998, as well as true freshman Nate Kolterman, who sat out as a red-shirt.

"Nate has the kind of spunk you're looking for," Tenopir said. "He's a very intense guy, a very intelligent person. He'll pick up stuff pretty well. So the cupboard isn't bare. But it's young."

Because of the youngsters in the offensive line this season, "we probably weren't as physical, strength-wise as we could have been or as we will be," said Tenopir. "But they all got their taste of it.

"They know exactly what they've got to improve on strength-wise. They'll have a good off-season. So I think there's some promise, that we're going to be a pretty good one before they're out of here."

The offensive linemen learned the importance of strength and conditioning this season.

They also learned the importance "of the mental part, having things become second-nature," Tenopir said. "When we talk about the off-season, we don't always talk about being stronger. They also have to work on the mental part, studying tapes, keeping abreast of different things. And they will."

The measuring stick for Nebraska's offensive lines over the past 20-plus seasons has been the Cornhuskers' national ranking in rushing offense. This season, that ranking dropped to No. 6, with an average of 253.8 yards per game — easily the lowest since 1976.

Nebraska rushed for more than 300 yards in only three games, while being held under 200 four times, including a low of 73 against Oklahoma State. Even though such numbers were the result of a variety of factors, among them instability at quarterback and I-back, the line took the brunt of the blame.

"You get frustrated any time you don't perform well," Tenopir said of his own attitude. "But certainly the frustration wasn't earmarked toward them (the offensive linemen). All I can ask of them is to do what they can do, do their best, try to get better at something each week, and they did that.

"If you have frustrations, I guess, the majority of the time it's because of the lack of continuity. But our whole offensive football team was disrupted game after game, with quarterbacks, with I-backs, with whoever. Any time that happens, you're not going to be as smooth as you want to be.

"We all demand perfection. That's impossible. But that's what you strive for."

The prospects are for the offensive line to come closer to achieving such perfection in 1999. "We'll get back to the level we're accustomed to would be my guess," Tenopir said. ■

AGAINST ALL ODDS

Russell Froehlich is a math and computer science major. So he knows the odds against what he has accomplished by spending five seasons as a member of the Nebraska football team.

Statistically speaking, he shouldn't have done what he's done.

Statistical probability has its limitations, however. It "tells you about the group and the likelihood that any individual in a group will do a certain thing," said Froehlich, a fifth-year senior linebacker in 1998. "But it presupposes you don't know anything about the individual."

"It works great for things like Gallup polls. You get a random sample. It does tell you the averages of things. But statistics don't tell you a thing about any one individual."

Froehlich is an individual to whom the statistical probability of becoming a Cornhusker didn't apply. His mom wouldn't allow him to begin playing football until he was in junior high, and he had only modest success. He played on an eighth-grade "B team" and "actually got taken out of one of the games for repeatedly missing a tackle on the same play they (the opponents) were running at us."

"I really wasn't very good. But I knew what I was going to do."

He was going to help the Nebraska football team win a national championship, any way he could.

Froehlich formulated that plan when he was 7-years-old, after watching the Cornhuskers come up short of a national championship by losing to Miami 31-30 in the 1984 Orange Bowl game.

He watched the game on television, in Germany, where his father, Ralph, was stationed in the Air Force. "I didn't really understand football at the time," Russell said.

The game "was on at 2 o'clock in the morning, so I set my alarm and got up. My dad watched it with me, which was good because he could explain to me what was going on."

Nebraska, ranked No.1 from the beginning of the season to the end, lost when Coach Tom Osborne elected to go for a two-point conversion instead of settling for an almost-certain tie.

The Cornhuskers made a lasting impression on Froehlich, who was born in Omaha and spent the first six months of his life there — his dad was stationed at Offutt Air Force Base in Bellevue.

His dad returned to Offutt when Russell was in the fourth grade and eventually retired there.

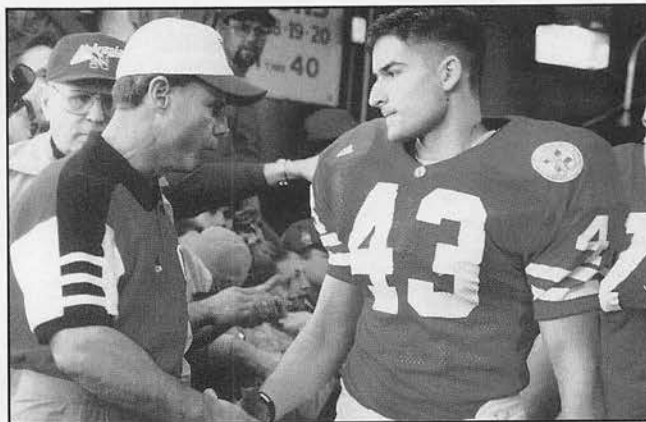
The Orange Bowl loss "just stuck with me," Russell said. "What I was going to do was play for Nebraska and win that national championship. That's what's driven me more than anything else since then."

His development as a football player didn't match his aspirations, however.

When he began playing in junior high, he weighed less than 100 pounds. "Slowly through high school, I got better," he said. "I got bigger. I got faster, just by out-working everybody else."

He played tight end and outside linebacker at Bellevue East, for Coach Bill James.

"By the time I was a senior, I still wasn't a great high school player. I started and had a decent couple of seasons. But I didn't really get (scholarship) offers from anywhere," he said.



Coach Frank Solich shakes hands with Russell Froehlich as the seniors are introduced before the Colorado game.

Only a scholarship offer from Nebraska would have mattered anyway because he was still determined to be a Cornhusker. So he sent videotapes to Nebraska, in hopes of being invited to walk on.

Even though "I never really got a response, there was no way I could give up the dream."

He read newspaper accounts of players who had been offered scholarships by Nebraska and "tried to compare myself, my height, my weight, how fast I was running," he said. "I started to think: 'It's not like they're in a whole different league. I'm close. If I had a shot, I think I could do this.'"

"So I'd keep lifting and running. I couldn't give up that dream of playing football here."

During the summer after his high school graduation, Froehlich persuaded Doug Seaman, a former Bellevue East teammate who had completed a year at Nebraska, to go with him to the football offices to inquire about walking on — Seaman subsequently made the team in a winter tryout.

They had a chance encounter with Osborne, though "I was willing to talk to anybody," said Froehlich. "To tell you the truth, I was too nervous, and I think Doug did most of the talking at first."

"Coach Osborne was real nice. I gave him a tape and the phone numbers of some of my high school coaches, figuring they could tell at least him I worked hard. Coach Osborne said if he could find a spot, he would get back to me. It was a longshot, not the traditional way of getting to play here."

Froehlich figured if that didn't work, he could always try out during winter conditioning. "If worst came to worst, which it looked like it would, I could go ahead and do that," he said.

Worst didn't come to worst, however. A couple of weeks later, Tony Samuel, who coached the Cornhusker rush ends and strongside linebackers, called to say "they had found a slot for me at SAM (linebacker), and would I be willing to report (for practice) in a couple of weeks."

Willing? Froehlich was ecstatic, until he went for his pre-practice physical.

He was concerned that people would be asking themselves: "How'd he get on the team?"

"I wasn't sure if everybody would look like Hercules or something, some superhero, and I wouldn't fit in," he said. "So I was happy after the first day just because I kind of

blended in, that nobody was surprised I was there, wondering: 'How did you get on the team? What are you doing here?'"

As is the case with nearly every walkon, and most scholarship recruits for that matter, Froehlich redshirted his first season and played on the scout team. He played on the scout team during his second season, and again during his third season. It wasn't until his fourth season, his junior year of eligibility, that he was issued a yellow practice jersey, signifying second-team status — which he shared.

"That was a big deal," Froehlich said. "It makes a big difference. You're finally running our defense, not the opponent's defense. You're finally expected to make the plays.

"If need be, I could have gone in a game, knowing everything that was going on. I still feel last season if I'd had to play in a big game, there wouldn't have been a dropoff. It wasn't like they ever planned to start me or anything. But I was finally in a position where I knew they defenses as well as anybody.

"I could have stepped in and played if need be. I wasn't going to let us lose."

Froehlich suffered a significant set-

back last spring, however, being sidelined by a hip-flexor injury that led to surgery during the summer and caused him to return to the scout team this fall.

When he learned of the depth-chart demotion, he considered giving up.

Until then, he never wavered in his determination, despite the odds.

Quitting was "never realistic," he said. "I would always do whatever I could for this team, so the only way I would quit was if I thought it was going to be better for the team."

He discussed the situation with linebackers coach Craig Bohl. I told him: "If the team would be better off without me, I'll leave." Bohl told him it wouldn't be better without him. So he stayed.

Froehlich played maybe 20 snaps, total, during his four seasons. But he has three national championship rings and has contributed to that success in his own way.

Froehlich compared himself to the main character in the movie "Rudy." All you would have to do is substitute Nebraska for Notre Dame and him for Rudy. The stories are identical.

"If you ask me would I trade the five years I've had here for five years where I started all four, I'm All-

American and win all kinds of trophies but we lose a game or two each year and I don't come out of here with any national championships, I'd tell you there's no way," said Froehlich.

"I'd rather be just another fan in the stands than not win those national championships."

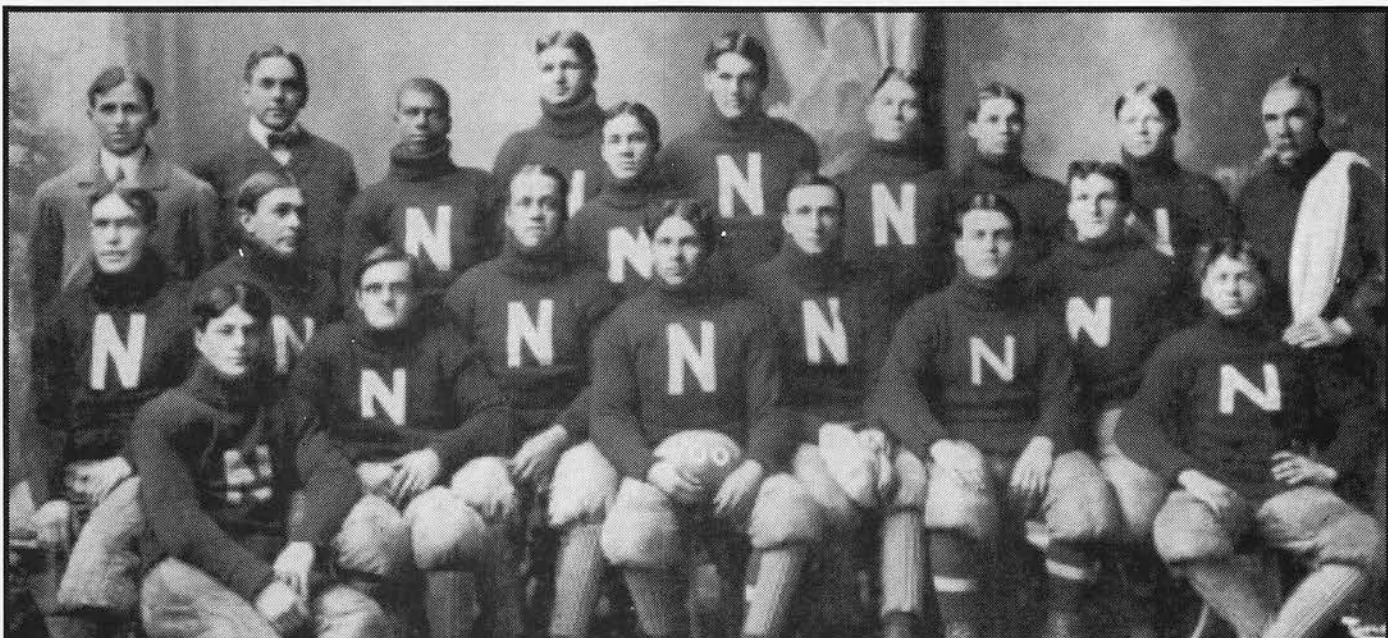
Odds? Consider the large goldfish beneath the foot bridge at Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo.

"There are so many fish, right on top of each other," Froehlich said. "Statistically, they're just randomly swimming about. You never know where one of them is going to end up. But if you were any one fish and decided you wanted to go any one place in the pond, you could go there.

"Just point toward it and swim there. You'll bump into a few other fish on the way, but you can get there if that's your goal. A lot of people don't take that approach. But you can see it with the fish. Any one of them can do it. They don't have to get bounced around randomly through life. They can pick a destination and swim toward it."

Froehlich picked his destination when he was 7-years-old.

And he was never knocked off course.



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More Boards Than Chalk

Venson Hamilton is Nebraska's new career rebounding leader

Midway through the second half of the Nebraska men's 65-47 victory against North Carolina A&T, during a timeout, Venson Hamilton was presented the game ball. The Cornhusker senior also received a standing ovation from a Devaney Sports Center crowd of 9,117.

The fans were acknowledging a job well-down.

With just under 12 minutes remaining in the game, Hamilton had rebounded a missed shot by freshman teammate Louis Truscott. The rebound was No. 783 of Hamilton's career, and it was one more than Leroy Chalk's career total, which had held as the Nebraska record for nearly 30 years.

The North Carolina A&T game was only the fifth of the season. In the previous four, Hamilton had passed Andre Smith, Rich King, and Dave Hoppen the Cornhusker career rebounding list.

By the end of this season, Hamilton "is going to move it another whole level up; I mean a whole level," coach Danny Nee said of the record. "He'll go easily 100, 150, maybe 200 above that.

"I don't think anyone's going to break it because he's going to shatter it."

That wasn't speculation. It was fact.

Six games after the North Carolina A&T victory, in a 55-51 loss against No. 17- and No. 21-ranked Minnesota, Hamilton grabbed a season-high 15 rebounds to increase his career total to 850. By averaging at least eight rebounds for the remain-

der of the season, he would reach 1,000.

Only 14 players at Big 12 schools have had 1,000 career rebounds and points.

Hamilton was only the 20th player in Cornhusker history to score 1,000 career points.

He went into the Christmas break averaging 12.8 points per game. If he were to maintain that scoring pace and Nebraska were to extend its season by more than one game in the Big 12 Tournament, he would move past Tom Baack and into the Cornhusker Top 10 in career scoring.

Hamilton also could finish as Nebraska's career leader in blocked shots. He rejected two against Minnesota to tie Rich King for second, with 183. Mikki Moore tops the list with 236.

The Cornhuskers expected such numbers from Hamilton when they recruited him from Oak Hill Academy in Mouth of Wilson, Va., where he was a teammate of the NBA's Ron Mercer.

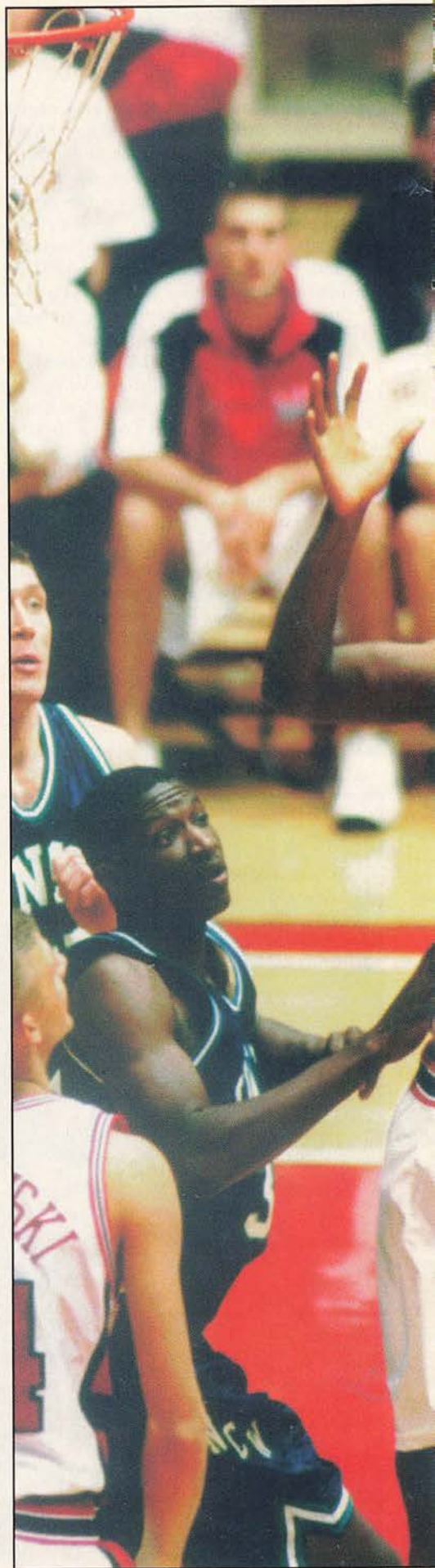
Hamilton's home is in Forest City, N.C., about 40 miles west of Charlotte.

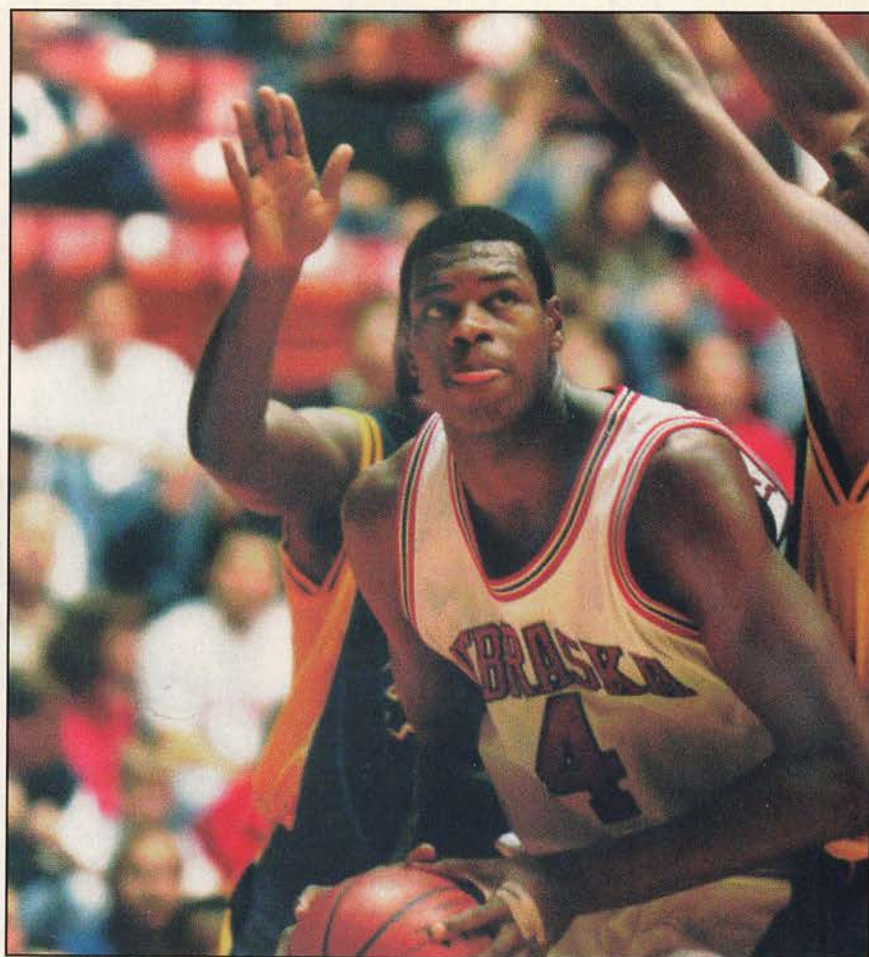
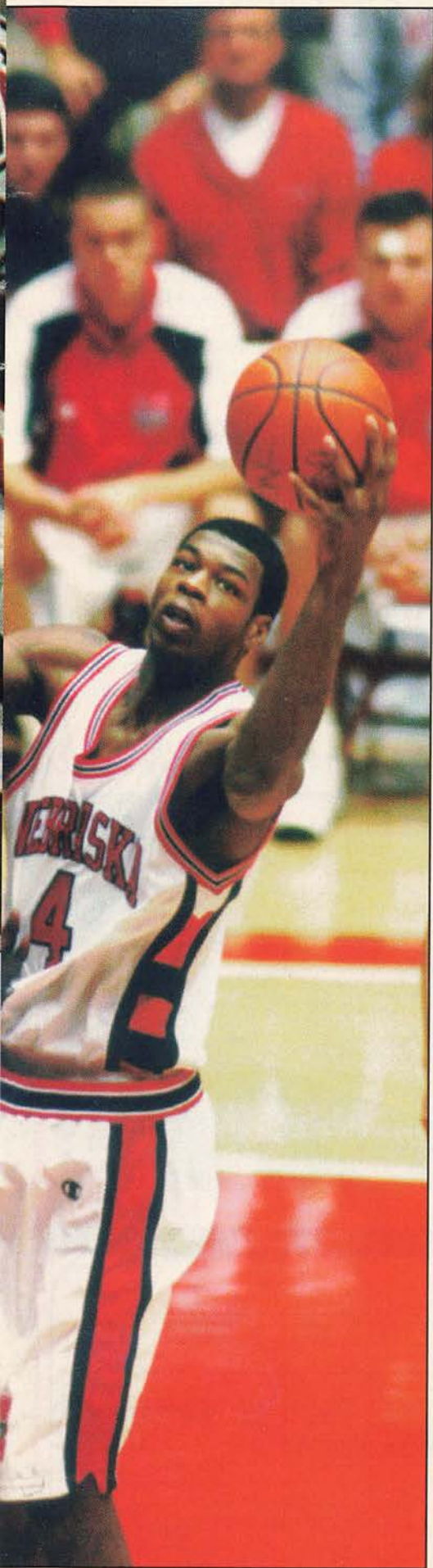
He played three seasons at East Rutherford High in Forest City before enrolling at Oak Hill to improve his grades and gain recruiting exposure. At Oak Hill, he averaged 12 points and 10 rebounds for a team that finished 33-3 and was No. 1 in the nation for six weeks in the USA Today rankings.

Six players on that team, including Hamilton and Mercer, earned Division IA scholarships.

"I do think he likes to rebound. You know what I mean? He has always done that, and he's done it well. He goes after the ball extremely well. And he enjoys it."

— Danny Nee





Venson Hamilton's rebounding success is a result, in part, of his athletic ability. He's 6-foot-10 and 240 pounds, with long arms and a great instinct for the the ball, according to Nebraska coach Danny Nee.

Hamilton's season's rebound average was the second-highest in Oak Hill history. Rebounding "was probably his best asset" when he came to Nebraska, according to Nee.

"And he's just gotten better and better," Nee said.

Hamilton started strong, averaging 5.0 rebounds and blocking 39 shots as a freshman, despite playing just under 15 minutes per game off the bench for the 1996 NIT championship team.

He contributed 13 points and nine rebounds to the NIT semifinal victory against Tulane.

Hamilton's rebounding success is a result, in part, of his athletic ability. He's 6-foot-10 and 240 pounds, with long arms and a great instinct for the ball, according to Nee.

"But I do think he likes to rebound. You know what I mean? He has always done that, and he's done it well," said Nee. "He goes after the ball extremely well. And he enjoys it."

Hamilton struggled offensively against Minnesota, as did his team-

mates. He was 0-for-9 from the field, and scored only five points. The Cornhuskers shot only 25.5 percent from the field, their lowest during Nee's tenure as head coach and their lowest-ever at the Sports Center.

But Hamilton was still a factor in the upset bid with of his rebounding.

The audience that night included four NBA scouts, at least one of whom was interested in Hamilton as well as Minnesota forward Quincy Lewis — who scored a game-high 15 points.

Hamilton has the ability to play at the next level, according to Nee.

"We're trying to develop him," Nee said. "We certainly think he has an opportunity. He has to keep getting better, stronger and more consistent. But we believe he has the potential."

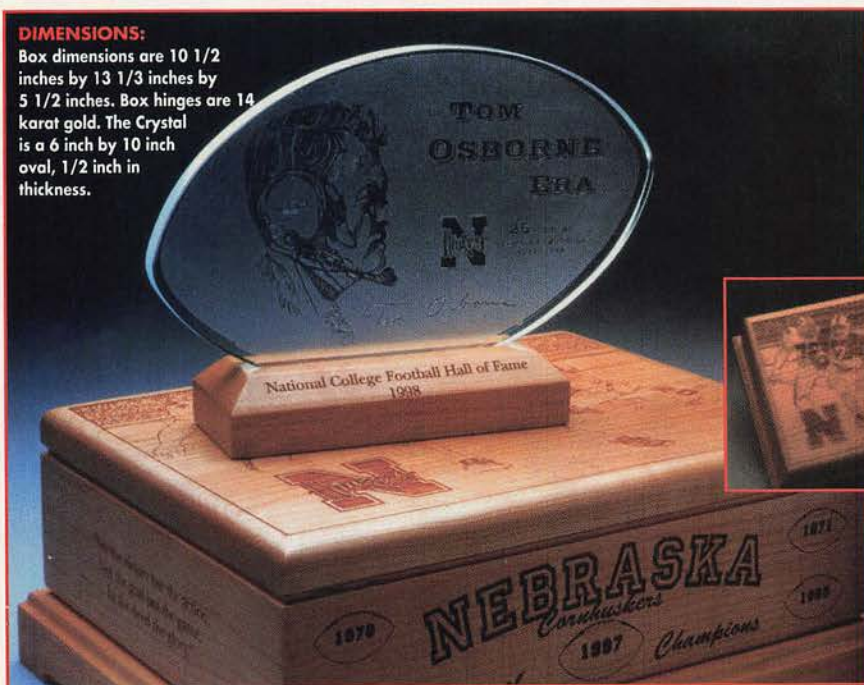
If that were to happen, it would be because of his rebounding ability.

"That would be the reason, absolutely," said Nee. ■

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RIM SHOTS

Notes And Quotes From The Basketball World

AROUND THE HORN

Redshirted freshman Cary Cochran is the leading career scorer in Iowa high school history. He scored 2,650 points in four seasons at Tri-Center High School in Minden, Iowa.

So it's no surprise that Cochran has the mindset of a shooter.

Even though the Cornhuskers shot only 25.5 percent from the field in a 55-51 loss to Minnesota at the Devaney Sports Center in mid-December, Cochran told reporters afterward: "We're not a bad shooting team. The stats are just not indicating that. Some time, they'll (shots) have to drop."

The 25.5 percent was the lowest by Nebraska in Danny Nee's 13 seasons as coach and the lowest by the Cornhuskers at the Bob Devaney Sports Center ever. The previous low for a Nee-coached team was 27.8 percent in a 68-48 loss to Oklahoma State in the Big Eight Tournament in 1995.

Senior Troy Piatkowski shared Cochran's optimism about the offense.

"Our shots will fall," he said. "I'm not worried about that."

Going into Big 12 Conference play, shooting was a significant concern, however. Nebraska also struggled to hit shots in December losses to Tulsa (.305) and Colorado State (.321).



Guard Nicole Kubik, a junior from Cambridge, leads the Nebraska women in scoring.

HARRIMAN LEAVES

The Cornhuskers lost 6-foot-10 sophomore Brant Harriman in early December. The reserve center decided to transfer to Jacksonville State for second semester. He had played in seven of eight games, one of which he started. But he was averaging only 7.4 minutes per game.

His decision was based on a desire for more playing time.

"We are sorry to see Brant leaving Nebraska. We wish him well, wherever he decides to continue his education and college basketball career," coach Danny Nee said in a statement released by the sports information office. "Brant is an excellent young man and has a good future."

Harriman was a scholarship recruit from Mason City, Iowa, where he played on a two-time Class 4A state championship team along with Iowa guard Dean Oliver. He played in 31 games last season, averaging 2.0 points and 2.6 rebounds, with highs of 10 points and seven rebounds against Grambling State.

WHO NEEDS CREDIT?

Hoya paranoia? Not really. The words were Nee's after the Cornhuskers' impressive 76-60 victory against intrastate rival Creighton in early December. "If we had lost the game, all the questions would have come. Now that we won, you'll probably say you're supposed to beat Creighton."

"So we won't get any credit for it either way."

Defeating the previously unbeaten Bluejays was "very important, the way you guys are with us," Nee told reporters. "You'd be burying us. So I think it was a big, big win, and I told the players that."

Creighton came to the Sports Center with a 6-0 record.

KUBIK COMES THROUGH

Coach Paul Sanderford's women's team also defeated Creighton, though the Huskers had to rally from an 18-point deficit early in the second half in order to do so, 82-74.

Guard Nicole Kubik, a junior from Cambridge, Neb., led the Huskers in scoring with 25 points, prompting Sanderford to tell the Lincoln Journal Star: "Nicole's a big-time player at crunch time. If you notice, when she gets on a roll, you need to give her the ball and get out of the way."

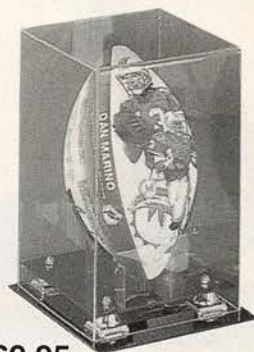
Nebraska has won the last four games with Creighton and leads the intrastate series 17-7. ■

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Another Special Season

Nebraska's volleyball team came within two victories of a national championship
By Todd Henrichs

Long Beach State and Penn State, the first unbeaten teams to ever meet for an NCAA championship, distinguished themselves as the class of collegiate volleyball this fall.

Nebraska had to settle for being the best of the rest.

Although the Huskers came within two wins of their dream — a national championship — 1998 was still in many ways a dream season for Nebraska. The Huskers won their second Big 12 Conference championship, made a 17th straight appearance in the NCAA Tournament and reached their sixth Final Four before falling 15-11, 15-8, 8-15, 15-11 to Penn State in the national semifinals.

Nebraska's Terry Pettit, who picked up career coaching win No. 700 this season, had few complaints, even though he had to sit and watch December's championship match from the stands. He said the Huskers came close to reaching their

full potential.

"It was a very good season from a lot of standpoints," Pettit said. "As a coach, it was exciting because they did so much last spring to prepare themselves for this fall. It was probably as deep and supportive a team as I've ever coached. They trusted each other."

Together, the Huskers won 32 of 34 matches — tying NU's modern-era record for wins in a season — and completed an improbable run just to reach the Final Four in Madison, Wis.

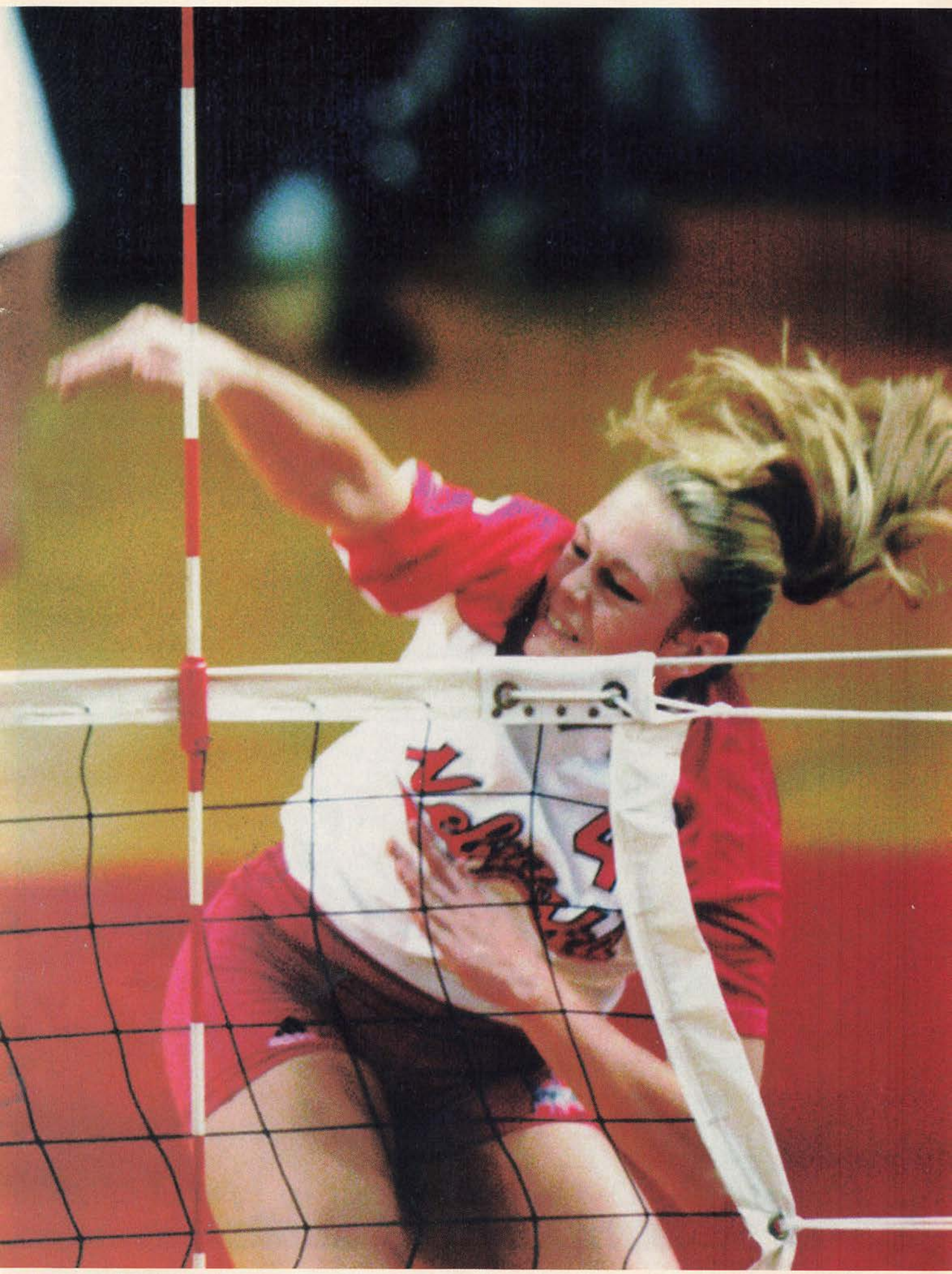
■ To begin with, Nebraska had to replace its best attacker this season. Nancy Meendering, however, was a perfect fit for the big shoes left by Lisa Reitsma at outside hitter. Meendering, who first followed Reitsma at Western Christian High School in Hull, Iowa, pounded an NU-sophomore record 518 kills to win All-America honors.

■ Late in the regular season, Nebraska had to recover from its first loss. However, less than 24

Mandy Monson provided the spark to help the Huskers recover from their first loss and reclaim control of the Big 12 Conference race.

Scott Bruhn





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hours after falling at Texas A&M, surprise starter Mandy Monson led the Huskers past rival Texas on the road to reclaim control of the Big 12 championship race.

■ Finally, the Huskers tempted fate time and time again in NCAA play. Nebraska fought back from a first-game loss to defeat Utah in the second round, then needed rallies from two-games-to-one deficits to defeat Pepperdine and Wisconsin in the Pacific Regional.

Pettit allowed his emotions to show after the Huskers' 12-15, 18-16, 9-15, 15-10, 15-10 win over Wisconsin, a match in which Nebraska fought off 14 game points in Game 2 to keep its Final Four hopes alive.

"I told my team to relish in this, but be humble," Pettit said before the din of 4,271 roaring fans faded at the NU Coliseum. "The chance to play in something like this doesn't happen very often."

Sophomore Nancy Meendering was a perfect fit to replace Lisa Reitsma at outside hitter. Meendering first followed Reitsma at Western Christian High School in Hull, Iowa.

Nebraska tried to come from behind again at the Final Four, but after building a 6-2 lead in Game 4, the Huskers finally gave in to reality. Penn State and Long Beach State, which defeated the Nittany Lions for the title in a five-game thriller, were ranked just ahead of Nebraska throughout the season.

"We had a lot of good points in the match," NU's Jaime Krondak, a Lincoln East graduate, said of the battle with Penn State. "I just wish we could have kept with it a little bit longer."

Instead, Nebraska had to say goodbye to seniors Krondak, Fiona Nepo and Megan Korver after the loss. Nepo, NU's career leader in set assists, and Korver capped their careers with All-America honors, just two of the highlights in a three-year run in which NU went 89-13 and twice reached the Final Four.

A day after Nebraska's latest season came to an end, Pettit didn't hesitate when asked to look ahead to next year. He said the Huskers lost three key seniors following their 1995 championship season, but found their way back to the Final Four a year later. The same could

happen in 1999.

"I always look at it in terms of cycles," said Pettit, who leads one of just five NCAA Division I volleyball programs that can boast 18 consecutive winning seasons. "We just ended a three-year cycle, and next year we'll start a new cycle."

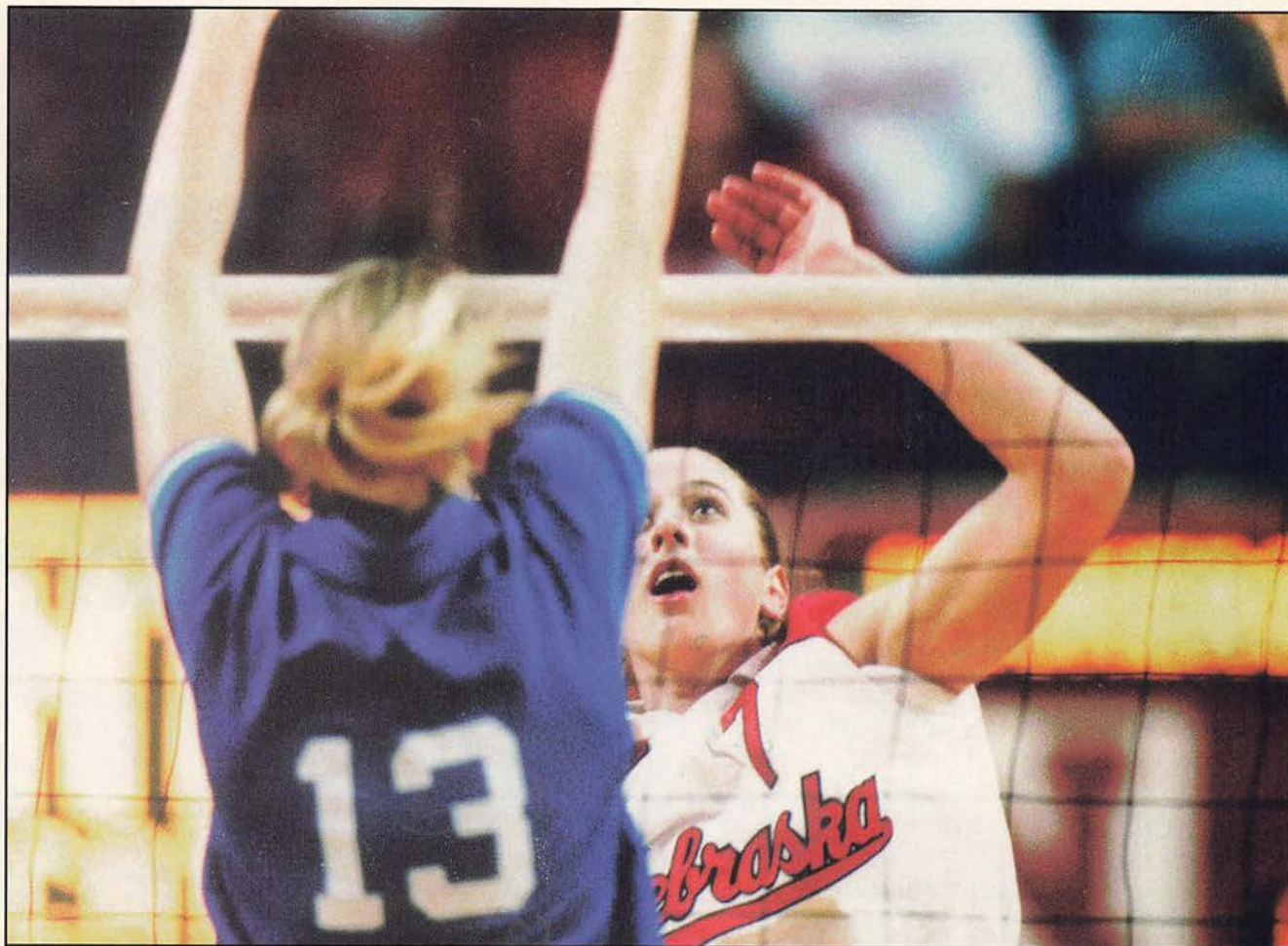
"The first year of this cycle was Fiona's first year, and we ended in a Final Four."

A Final Four trip to Honolulu can happen in 1999, Pettit said, if Nebraska can surround Meendering with the right blend of players. Meendering carried Nebraska's offense down the stretch this season with 111 kills in her final four matches.

"She was a great player for us the last six weeks," Pettit said. "I don't see her averaging more kills than that, but in terms of blocking, defense and ball-handling, I think we'll see improvement there next year."

The all-important leadership chores will be handed to Tonia Tauke, Monson and defensive specialists Nikki Henk and Kim Crandall, NU's next class of seniors.

Tauke returns as one of the top



blockers in NU history. The native of Council Bluffs, Iowa, fell one short of NU's single-season record for block assists in 1998.

But all eyes next season will be on Jill McWilliams, Nebraska's lone returning setter. The sophomore from Des Moines, Iowa, helped NU defeat nationally ranked Kansas State in her only career start this season. Pettit said that victory should have everyone confident McWilliams can fill Nepo's shoes next year.

"She'll be working out every day, and we'll get her as many touches on the ball as we can," Pettit said. "She's already significantly improved this year."

Nebraska expects to add four recruits in February: setters Lindsay Wischmeier of Lewiston and Greichaly Cepero of Puerto Rico and hitter/blockers Laura Pilakowski of Columbus and Amber Holmquist of Alief, Texas.

Pettit said he couldn't predict how much any newcomer might contribute next season. But whatever the lineup, he promised the Huskers will be ready to battle for



Nancy Meendering (second from left) celebrates with Megan Korver, as Fiona Nepo flashes her familiar smile. Meendering, Meendering, a sophomore, and seniors Korver and Nepo were All-America selections.

top honors again next year.

"We'll build a system around the six or seven best athletes we can

find," Pettit said. "Hopefully that will be enough to get us to where we want to be." ■

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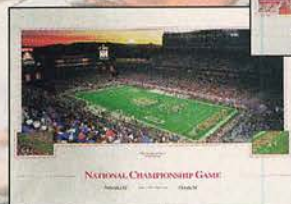
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10 QUESTIONS

Huskers Illustrated talks with junior guard Brooke Schwartz

Who is the basketball player, at any level, you most admire?

"I'd say, when I was growing up, it was definitely Larry Bird. My dad liked him, and my brother liked Michael Jordan, and my other brother liked Magic Johnson, so I had to like Larry Bird. You just have to love a guy who can't necessarily play over the rim but can do so much else. I loved his passes."

What is the most bizarre thing you have seen Coach Paul Sanderford do in practice?

"We were running a play on the opposite side of the court from him, and he blew the whistle and said, 'Stop, stop, stop!' And he charged down the floor at us. All of the players were like, 'He's running at us.' We looked at each other like, 'What are we supposed to do?' We were all so stunned we didn't hear a word he said. He's not the smoothest runner you've ever seen, either. When Coach Sanderford is running, you'd better start running ..."

What's your favorite thing about Gering?

"Steve and Cyndie Schwartz, my parents. I'd also have to say my high school coach (Don Jacobs) and his family. Really the only reason I like to go home now is to see my family. And I was really close to my coach and his family."

If for some reason you could no longer compete as an athlete, what would fill your time?

"I've thought of that ... I think I'd have some catching up on my sleep. I neglect my bed a lot. We're just not as tight as we used to be."

What's the best movie you've seen lately?

"I have a lot of favorites. Top Gun; Liar, Liar, but right now I'd have to say Armageddon. Just because of the ending. And it's a father-daughter movie, and I'm the biggest daddy's girl there is."

Is there a possibility you could ever beat your brother Travis (a team manager for the NU women) in a one-on-one basketball game?

"Is there a possibility he could ever beat me? That's the question you have to ask. (Seriously), he'll take me down and post me up, and when Travis gets in a zone he can't miss. I don't care where he is. Growing up, we'd play a lot of one-on-one, and my goal was to beat him. We'd go out on the driveway and just battle ... I'd beat him sometimes. I hated beating him, because I could never win the next game."

Did you ever strongly consider playing college basketball anywhere else?

"I thought about Colorado because it was close, and I wanted to be in Colorado. But they offered someone else a scholarship ... The week I was going to commit to Nebraska, Kansas was talking to me heavily, and I put off Nebraska. Then I just thought, 'Why am I yanking around Kansas, when deep down I really wanted to go to Nebraska?' "

What is your favorite place to play, other than the Devaney Sports Center?

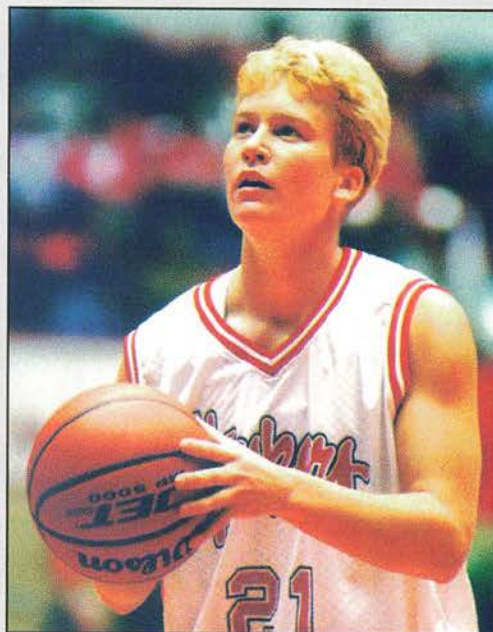
"I liked playing at Texas a lot. I remember going in there as a freshman and thinking, 'Wow, this looks like a Tennessee gym.' "

OK, you've won 21 straight at home, what is it about the Devaney Sports Center that makes it so special?

"It's our backyard. If there's any place that's your favorite place to play, it's your own backyard, and this is our backyard. You have your fans, you have your friends watching, your band, the smell of popcorn ... "

President Clinton — keep him or impeach him?

"Part of me says no because what he does with his personal life is his business. Everybody has a personal side and a professional side. On that side, I say leave him alone. But my other side says he has taken the responsibility of being a president, and that means he has to watch his Ps and Qs, and if he messes up he has to pay the consequences. So I'm kind of on both sides." ■



Big 12 Recruiting Update

RUMORS

Two of the nation's top quarterbacks recently cast their lots with respective teams. The nation's top-rated signal caller, Chris Simms of Franklin Lakes Ramapo, N.J., committed to Tennessee, over Texas. Simms, the son of former NFL great Phil Simms, is a left-hander and a pure drop-back style of passer.

Gary Brashears of Clarksville, Ark., is rated right behind Simms as a pure passing quarterback. Brashears had offers from Florida State, Michigan and Miami but decided to stay in-state and sign with Houston Nutt and Arkansas.

The top five passing quarterbacks in the country had all committed before the holidays. In addition to Simms and Brashears, J.P. Losman of Los Angeles Venice picked UCLA, Rex Grossman of Bloomington (South), Ind., chose Florida, and Chris Lewis of Long Beach (Poly), Calif., said yes to Stanford.

Texas is putting together a great recruiting class in the Big 12, but they have yet to get a commitment from a quarterback. Losing Simms hurt, but the Longhorns turned their attention to Eli Manning (Archie's son and Peyton's brother) of New Orleans Newman. Manning has already visited Austin, and the Longhorns lead Ole Miss and LSU.

Dontae Walker of Clinton, Miss., one of the nation's top five running backs, committed to Jackie Sherrill at Mississippi State.

Texas continued to lead the Big 12 in verbal commitments with 21, with Oklahoma State next with 13 and then the Huskers with 13. Missouri was also off to a great start with 12 with one more visitation group coming in before Christmas.

The Cowboys are taking more of a national approach in their recruiting, earning an oral commitment from offensive lineman Doug Koerning of Cape Carroll, Fla., over Miami, Auburn, Ole Miss and Tulane. ■

Huskers Recruit Iowan

**Council Bluffs
fullback, linebacker
commits to Nebraska**

By James Hale

The table is set for another outstanding Nebraska recruiting class. In typical fashion, the Cornhuskers had 13 commitments in the bag heading into the Christmas break. There have been years when the Cornhuskers have had more commitments at this time, but when you compare across the country, Nebraska is once again demonstrating that it is one of the top recruiting programs in the country.

Lucky verbal commitment No. 13 came in the person of Blanchard Johnson III (6-foot, 205 pounds with 4.6 speed in the 40-yard dash) of Council Bluffs (St. Albert), Iowa. Blanchard is another that the Huskers liked so much at their summer football camp that they offered him a scholarship while the rest of the recruiting world took a wait-and-see attitude.

Not a highly rated recruit, Johnson is without a doubt a super athlete. He will play either fullback or linebacker at Nebraska and has credentials to do both. As a running back, Johnson rushed for 1,929 yards and 35 touchdowns, showing tremendous power, balance and vision this past season. At linebacker, Johnson was all over the field, making 161 tackles and showing a tremendous instinct for the ball.

Johnson posted similar numbers his junior season, when he finished

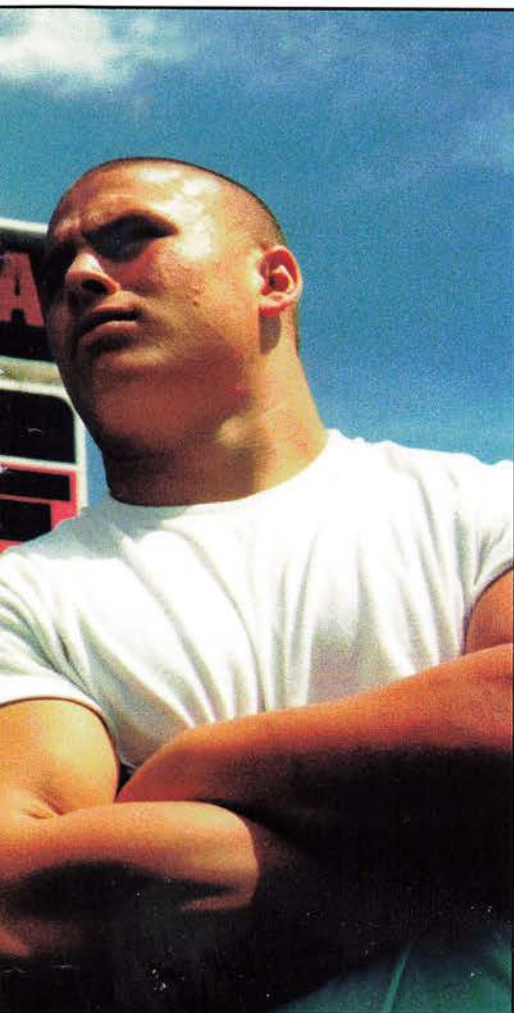
with 225 tackles, before suffering a compound leg fracture in the final regular-season game. Johnson's father coaches him in wrestling, and he's a two time state-qualifier. He also starts at catcher in baseball and has run a 10.9 in the 100 meters in track.

"I really had a good time and learned a lot about football when I went to Nebraska back in the summer," Johnson said. "It was a great camp, and I really felt the coaches had a genuine interest in me personally, despite the fact I was only going to be there for a few days. There isn't a football program in the country that has a better tradition than Nebraska, and it's a super feeling to know that I am going to play my college football there."

Nebraska beat Iowa and Iowa State for Johnson's services.

Nebraska was also leading on the top-rated athlete in Iowa. Tight end/defensive end Darin Naatjes (6'7, 230, 4.5) of Inwood West visited Nebraska Dec. 12, and the Huskers are way out in front of Iowa, Tennessee and Arizona State, but





Offensive lineman Tim Green of Omaha Westside is among the athletes who have committed to Nebraska and are expected to sign Feb. 3.

may be in a dead heat with pro baseball.

"I still haven't decided if I am going to give pro baseball a try or not," Naatjes said. "I guess it still depends on how high I go in the draft. I definitely want to play both sports in college, and Nebraska has told me I can do that with them."

The Huskers finished out the December recruiting season with visits from a group that included two of their top quarterback recruits.

Chris Massey (6-1, 198, 4.4) of Sprio, Okla., is rated the top run/pass quarterback in the country. Massey had visits set with Michigan, Nebraska, Kansas State, Notre Dame and Miami and also planned to take an unofficial visit to Oklahoma in January.

Massey is the prototype of the style of quarterback the Huskers are looking for. Blessed with amazing speed, Massey is a running back at quarterback with a strong arm to

REP REPORT

Keeping Up With Colby Freeman

Recruiting is going real well for me at this point. We are not talking football anymore, and that is disappointing, but we have moved on to the next part of my life, and that is recruiting right now. I am having a lot fun, and it has become easier to get involved with schools and coaches. I now have a one-on-one relationship with the coaches that are recruiting me, and that is very exciting for me.

My first visit was to Texas. Mack Brown and his staff have generated so much excitement through Austin that it seems like you can't run into anybody who isn't talking Texas football. My hosts were Beau Baker and Aaron Humphries, and it's real exciting what they have going on there. They have really turned that program around, and it's neat to see that.

I have often thought of what the University of Texas was and Austin would be like. It turned out to be even more than I thought. I have always been intimidated by Austin, just because of its size, compared to Brownwood. We have around 20,000 people here, and going into to Austin is something that has always intimidated me and bothered me about UT. However, I was able to realize that when you break Austin up into different sections that you get a bunch of small towns in one big city. So, it surprised me that I could fit into a big city like that. It was also my first chance to really see the Texas campus, and I enjoyed that also.

My trip to Nebraska was a lot of traveling. We finally got there, and once everything settled down, I was so impressed with the tradition up there and how loyal each athlete is to the football program. You can just sense how much pride they have in their school and their football team.

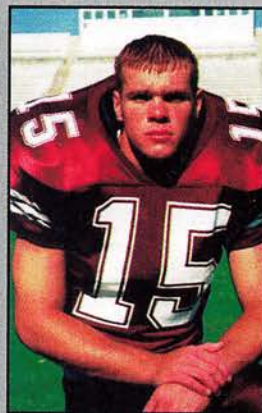
The main thing they tried to emphasize with me was how I fit into their offense. They showed me that I really fit in with an option team, and that is something that they bring to the table in their program. Also the work ethic and their facilities are things they use to try to impress people, and it works. I also want to add that their academic program is incredible. They also spend as much time and money on their academic situation as they do their football. It's pretty much an all-around school if you can just make yourself go all the way up there.

I really can't find many negatives with either school, but the main thing with Texas is the traffic in the city and the fact if you want to go somewhere and have to drive 30 minutes to get there, and it doesn't seem that you have gone very far.

Nebraska is a length away from home. I talked to Ron Brown, their receivers coach today, and I told him that the thing that I have to think about is how going to Nebraska would affect my family and their ability to see me play. My family has gotten me to the point that I am now going to play college football. To deprive them of an opportunity to see me play is something that I have to take into account. I give them all the credit for my ability, and they are a big part of my life. Going to Nebraska I would be bothered if dad wasn't at a game, so we as a family are going to have to work out how they can get to games.

I am looking forward to my visit to Texas A&M. I really know a lot already about A&M, so it makes it hard to ask questions to the coaches. I look forward to spending a lot of time with the quarterback coach to find out what they want to do with their offense and things like that.

When I get back from that visit, I want to go to the lake or something and just get away, so that I can hash everything out in my mind. I want to weigh the pros and cons and then make a decision. ■ — **As told to James Hale**



Throughout the 1998 football season, Huskers Illustrated has chronicled the recruiting process of Brownwood quarterback Colby Freeman, one of the top prospects in Texas.

back defenses off the line of scrimmage. Massey rushed for more than 1,200 yards this past season, while throwing for 1,200. He also excelled in the secondary, with more than 100 tackles and four interceptions.

Massey still gives the impression that he's leaning in-state either at Oklahoma State, where he took an unofficial visit Dec. 4, or Oklahoma, but Nebraska is the type of program that could chance his mind.

"Nebraska is the one school that I look at and feel they have an offense that is perfect for my abilities," Massey said. "Their quarterbacks do and are allowed to do exactly what I feel I can do best. They run some option, quarterback draws, bootlegs, and throw the ball, and all those things are my strengths in football."

Jamaal Lord (6-3, 190, 4.6) of Bayonne, N.J., has emerged as a top quarterback prospect for the Huskers. Lord excels at running option football and also has the ability to play in the secondary. He visited Iowa and Nebraska and was to visit Minnesota and East Carolina in January.

The nation's top defensive end

"I have always had my eye on Nebraska. They love to run the tailback. Their offense is really perfect for my style of play, and they have one of the top programs in the country."

— Onterio Smith

prospect also visited Nebraska in December. Cole Pittman (6-4, 260, 4.7) of Shreveport (Evangel Christian), La., is in a unique position for a prep athlete in that he will graduate at semester and enroll at some college in January. He visited LSU in October and hit Florida, Texas and Nebraska all in a row.

"I have been studying all these schools for some time," Pittman said. "I have taken unofficial visits to several schools. I have to make a decision very quickly, and I am trying to be as prepared as I possibly can be to make that decision. I am looking forward to my visit at Nebraska and have always felt their

program was a good one for me."

Cornerback Brandon Williams (5-10, 175, 4.4) of Omaha Central gave the Huskers his final shot in December. Williams had visits set with New Mexico State, Michigan and possibly Colorado State.

"Nebraska is a great school that has always treated me with respect," Williams said. "I have some good offers, and I am just trying to weigh every one out, so that I can make the best decision for me."

Offensive lineman Kip Sixberry (6-3, 312, 5.1) of Denver Mullen has also emerged as one of the Huskers' top recruits. Sixberry had visits set to Kentucky, Iowa, Nebraska, Northwestern and Oregon.

Nebraska has also brought in defensive tackle Chad Pugh (6-4, 270, 4.9) of Saginaw (Boswell), Texas, who is regarded as one of the top 30 players in Texas. Pugh is looking hard at Texas and Texas A&M, with TCU and Baylor also in contention.

The Huskers have also managed to draw the interest of some of the top running backs in the country. Onterio Smith (5-11, 180, 4.4) of Sacramento (Grant), Calif., is rated as one of the top two running backs in California and one of the top 100 players in the country.

Smith has the fantastic ability to make people miss in open field and just seems to blow by defenders when it comes down to pure speed. The only visit Smith had set at press time was to Nebraska because of his busy schedule. However, Smith is looking at Washington, USC, Tennessee, California and UCLA.

"I have always had my eye on Nebraska. They love to run the tailback," Smith said. "Their offense is really perfect for my style of play, and they have one of the top programs in the country."

Along with Smith, Nebraska brought in quarterback Colby Freeman (6-3, 205, 4.5) of Brownwood, Texas, defensive tackle

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Ryan Haywood (6-5, 280, 4.8) of Denver Jefferson, outside linebacker Shaun Coleman (6-4, 212, 4.4) of Aurora (Regis Jesuit), Colo., outside linebacker Ricky Cottonjimm (6-2, 185, 4.4) of Elk Grove, Calif., and offensive lineman Tim Green (6-5, 300, 5.25) of Omaha Westside.

The Huskers trailed on one of their earlier visitors. Offensive lineman Shane Lehman (6'5, 272, 5.12) of Corona, Calif., was leaning toward UCLA over the Huskers. He's regarded as one of the top 100 players in the country.

All-world linebacker Joe Siofele (6-2, 235, 4.6) of Honolulu St. Louis was to visit Nebraska in January. The Huskers led Washington, Arizona, Colorado and Northwestern. Siofele is one of the top inside linebackers in the country.

Defensive cornerback Sammy Davis (6-0, 180, 4.4) of Humble, Texas, was scheduled to visit Nebraska but canceled after committing to Texas A&M. ■

Watch for special signing day coverage in the March edition of Huskers Illustrated.

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To Be Frank, It Wasn't So Bad

How Solich's first season as head coach is evaluated depends on one's point of view



**Mike
BABCOCK**

THE MAN IN THE LOBBY of the post office expressed what was probably a popular opinion following the Nebraska football team's 23-20 loss to Arizona in the Holiday Bowl.

"I guess we needed Tom," he said without rancor or malice.

Tom, of course, was a reference to Tom Osborne.

The implication was, had Osborne still been the Cornhuskers' coach, they would have won the Holiday Bowl. In fact, had Osborne still been the coach, they probably would have been in a Bowl Championship Series game, maybe even the Fiesta Bowl, playing for the national championship.

That's the thing about such an assertion. There's no way to disprove it.

Maybe Nebraska would have won the Holiday Bowl, or played Tennessee for the national championship in Tempe, Ariz. A Hall of Fame coach on the sideline is bound to make a difference.

But Osborne wasn't on the sideline this season. Solich was.

And it's as reasonable to assume the Cornhuskers were as successful as they could have been as it is to assume things would have been significantly different had Osborne been the coach.

Following a brief discussion, the man in the lobby of the post office agreed, conceding that if Nebraska had been 9-4 under Osborne, the season would have been perceived differently.

After 25 seasons — and, more importantly, three national championships — fans were comfortable with Osborne. They were confident he would get the most out of what he had. It will take time, and an undefeated season or two, for Solich to build such trust. That's human nature.

Considering the glitches that are bound to occur in any transition of authority, as well as the injury problems that, Solich deserves high marks for his first season.

Among the misconceptions arising this season was that certain deficiencies were a direct reflection of a change in philosophy, that there was a one-to-one correlation between Solich's being the coach and the Cornhuskers' inability to establish a consistent running attack, for example.

Such misconceptions elicited a post-Holiday Bowl question regarding whether he planned to do things differently next season. "I had the opportunity to do things differently this year," Solich said. "I decided going into it I would coach this team my own way, under my own personality."

"I didn't want to do things that weren't very bright, though. I didn't want to throw away all the great things we were doing just to make a lot of changes. The idea not to make a lot of changes was because we had a lot of things

going well for us, and we wanted to just keep it that way."

When Osborne indicated the timing of his stepping aside was to ensure continuity in the program, he didn't mean it ought to remain unchanged. "It was not a situation where I felt overshadowed or felt I had to keep the program right where it was, doing everything we had done before," said Solich.

"Things I did, I did because I thought they were the best thing to win."

He will continue to evaluate the program and shape it to fit his personality, just as Osborne did. "There are always changes from season to season to be made by about any coaching staff. We'll go about looking at things and trying to make changes necessary to improve our team," he said.

There's room for improvement, though how Solich's first season is evaluated depends on one's point of view. Four losses were the most by a Cornhusker team in 30 years. But nine victories were as many as Osborne and Bob Devaney had in their first seasons as head coach at Nebraska.

Devaney's grace period was considerably greater than Osborne's or Solich's, given the seasons of frustration that preceded his arrival in 1962. Osborne faced a situation similar to Solich's, though he at least had one season between his first and back-to-back national championships.

Solich took over immediately after the euphoria of three national titles in four seasons.

"It's going to be difficult for any program to have three undefeated seasons

in as short a time as we had," he said, pointing out what ought to be obvious — but isn't when it's just been done.

"You want to make sure you don't look at things in such a manner that when you critique the program, you start doing things because someone thinks it's falling apart. There were a lot of good things that happened this year. There was a lot of good football played by this team."

After perfection, however, only the flaws stand out.

Despite an erratic offense and a defense occasionally prone to giving up big plays, the Cornhuskers weren't all that far from being the national contenders to which we've become accustomed.

"It would be one thing if we were just getting totally dominated and if the games weren't close and if we weren't battling the top teams in the country right down to the very end," Solich said.

"Basically, I think that's what we were doing."

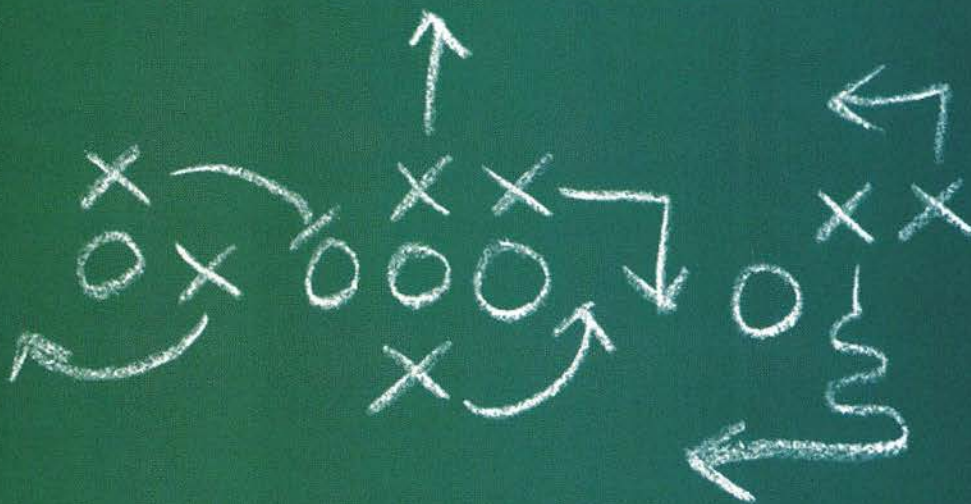
As time passes, distancing his program from the Osborne era, things should be easier for Solich. But that probably won't be the case next season. "Not necessarily," he said.

"I think there will still be quite a bit of focus on that."

"It will take more than one or two years, probably, for that to be the case." ■

1999 Schedule

Sept. 4	@ Iowa
Sept. 11	California
Sept. 18	So. Mississippi
Sept. 25	@ Missouri
Oct. 2	Oklahoma State
Oct. 9	Iowa State
Oct. 23	@ Texas
Oct. 30	@ Kansas
Nov. 6	Texas A&M
Nov. 13	Kansas State
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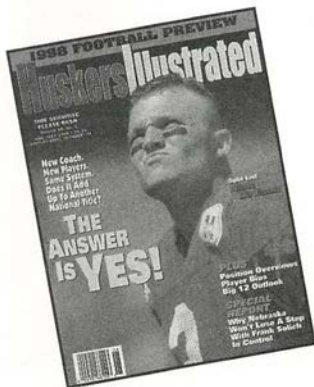
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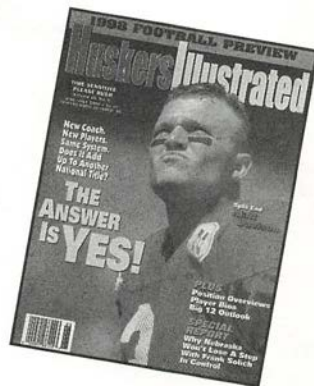
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